Suicided by Yoshinaga Yoshiaki

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My wife Tatsumi Saki died today.

June 17, 2001.

My colleague and editor, Aoyama Masaaki, arguably one of Japan's best subculture writers, died today.

May 10, 1998

Nekojiru, a colleague and friend of mine, a one-of-a-kind manga artist with a cult following, died today.

What they have in common is that they were all irreplaceable to me.

They were moody, but very charming and blessed with incredible talent.

And then…

They killed themselves.

Every year, over 34,000 people die by suicide in Japan.

But the grief of those 34,000 people alone doesn't end there.

The grief compounds. Suicide brings the death of parents, siblings, lovers, friends and coworkers.

The number of deaths grows and grows, a tragic spiral that claims 300,000, 500,000, even over a million people. I found that the only way to heal from this was to write.

Rather than simply wallowing in my grief, I had to make it meaningful, somehow. Otherwise, I'd drown in it and there would be no hope of salvation. I'd never be able to escape from it. In short, suicide isn't pretty.

Anyhow, I just want to get what happened to me out of my system. The loss I've endured will drive me crazy otherwise. My mind is already crumbling. I want writing to act as the shock therapy I need to bring me back to my senses. My wife will never come back. I'll never see her again. I can't accept that! I'll never accept that. That's why I write.

Do people who commit suicide not think of the damage it will cause to those around them? Are they overwhelmed by their own pain?

It must have been excruciatingly painful. But my wife and Nekojiru died out of pride.

I feel that way, at times.

"Dying out of pride"—it may seem noble at first glance, but it's the most selfish act ever. They probably believed dying to be easier than living. They probably wanted to be at peace.

Right now I feel so sad and alone, to the point of madness.

I wonder if my wife Saki would understand my pain.

Living may be harder than dying.

But I'm going to live.

Dying is like running away.

Most people don't. They instead desperately survive in this cruel world.

Will death really make things easier? I doubt it. No one knows what the afterlife holds. What's clear, though, is that they will never again be able to come into contact with myself and the living. Some people may claim they have the right to die. I don't reject such notions.

But I hope that people who feel like they want to die will reconsider.

That's why I'm writing this book. From pure emotion, not logic.

In these times, relying too much on logic can make you pessimistic, so I want to advocate for "living with emotion."

Because losing someone to death is true suffering.

Don't you agree, Saki? I'm in so much pain I could die. You were a kind person, weren't you? You understand my pain.

The dead never come back.

Death is irreversible.

There's nothing I can do.

Yet I can't come to terms with it. So…

I will write honestly about the truth behind suicide and the grief and regret of those left behind.

Rather than exploring the reasons someone may kill themselves, I will consider suicide from the perspective of the widowed—the one left behind among the living.

So that there will never be more people like myself, who have been "suicided."

Writing is all I have left in this life.

Chapter 1: My Wife, Saki

Left-Brained and Right-Brained

I, Yoshinaga Yoshiaki, am a freelance writer and editor.

Due to the devastation caused by my wife's death, I haven't touched writing and I'm struggling to make ends meet. Desperate, I work part-time, three days a week, at a local convenience store.

The store is run by a married couple. All the employees are part-timers in their twenties.

During my interview, I said frankly, "I'm an aspiring writer, but I can't make a living just writing these days."

I wanted to make it clear that working at the store isn't my main job.

"My primary job is writing, afterall…"

Thankfully, the store owner hired me.

"You're a college graduate." the owner said after reviewing my resume.

I was the only one there with a college degree.

I settled on a part-time schedule at the convenience store and gave my editors as much notice as possible. They were considerate enough to let me cancel my freelance contract for the time being.

I worked eight hours a day, from 8:00am to 5:00pm, excluding breaks. It was my first time dealing with customers and working a cash register.

The owner told me to refrain from wearing flashy clothes while on shift.

I don't usually wear particularly garish clothes; I tend to dress modestly, so even though I'd made a living as a freelancer, the restrictions didn't bother me.

There was one thing, however, that I couldn't compromise on.

"Can't you do something about that hair?"

I don't care for my hair being long, but my late wife did.

Saki liked when I grew it out. When it got hot and I tried to cut it, she'd say, "Don't cut it. You look better with it long."

After Saki passed away, I realized something.

There were many ways in which I was still trying to court her.

Even after she passed away, I continued to do the things she loved.

The reason I decided to write memoirs again was because Saki had told me this while she was alive:

"You should work harder and harder. You're not the intellectual type. You have intuition and sensitivity; you're a 'right-brained' person. Use that to your advantage. I believe in your

individuality."

Saki, who gave me this advice, was left-brained.

She was the kind of girl that worked hard, studied hard, always came up on top and made her peers look foolish in comparison. She only took interest in those who had something she didn't.

I'm right-brained. I'm used to seeing things visually, and I have a well-developed ear for music. These are things the brilliant Saki lacked, which was precisely why she was drawn to me. Once we got together, Saki, who liked my right-brainedness, began to complain that my left-brained, rational sensibilities weren't as dominant.

"Why can't you be a little more normal?"

Saki was tolerant of my extreme personality at work, but would criticize me in everyday life.

When she began to complain, I'd reply, "You fell in love with me because I'm not normal. I wish you'd just accept it."

"You have to be normal, after all."

——Now that I think about it, Saki and I had a codependent relationship. We clashed, yet were attracted to each other.

It worked out well for us. At least, I thought it did.

She always spoke about me like this:

"You have ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), depression, hay fever, atopic dermatitis, chemical sensitivities, and an autonomic nervous system disorder, making you extremely sensitive and easily damaged. Living with you is like raising a rare, eccentric animal that's difficult to care for."

Although it seemed like she was criticizing me, she was really just boasting about my eccentricity. Saki herself was an eccentric in many ways. She hated ordinary things.

How We Met

Tatsumi Saki and I met in 1996.

I was reaping the rewards of an economic bubble.

The bubble economy peaked in 1988 and burst in 1990. Money flowed into real estate and stocks. Japan buzzed with excitement and a desire to make money. Everyone thought they could become billionaires, and some people around me actually did.

The publishing bubble I experienced was personal. It happened in 1994.

After graduating from university in 1984, I worked in various corners of the publishing world.

I worked as a typesetter for women's comics, a reporter for a beauty industry magazine, and an editor for adult magazines. Then, while working for a magazine, I met Aoyama Masaaki, and in 1988 I began working in the editorial department of *Eccentric*, the overseas travel magazine he oversaw.

At the same time, I began working on a team to edit university entrance exam resource magazines and recruitment magazines. I also began working for *Bessatsu Takarajima* (Takarajima-sha).

We started making money when we worked with Aoyama on books like *Bessatsu Takarajima: Thailand Reader* and *Bessatsu Takarajima: Hidden Hawaii Reader* (both published by Takarajima-sha), *Dangerous Issue No. 1* and *Complete Manual for Using Adult Goods* (both published by Data House).

The books we produced sold quite well, and we began receiving royalties from editing. I edited and ghostwrote books, and accepted all requests for manuscripts and book editing. I was just about to turn thirty, too young to grow old, and I was fearless. I didn't mind staying up all night, and found my work fulfilling and enjoyable.

The most memorable era was when we were working on *Dangerous Issue No. 1*.

Dangerous Issue No. 1 was published by Data House, with Aoyama as editor-in-chief and myself as assistant editor. We published it at a pace of one volume every few years.

It was a mook book consisting of special features and serials, with editors advocating for "savagery" and "no taboo when it comes to fantasy."

Feature themes included drugs, an introduction to sadistic culture (corpses and murder, wiretapping, perversion, etc.), and hedonism. Some of the content was quite grotesque and frowned on by more sensible readers, but surprisingly, half of the readers surveyed were women.

Around the time the first issue of the magazine's cover story on stimulants was published, we received quite a number of unsolicited questions from readers such as, "Where can I buy stimulants?" and even a call from a woman who had taken stimulants and panicked, "What should I do?!"

The first three volumes of *Dangerous Issue No. 1* sold over 100,000 copies, and it was a bubble period for both the publishing world and myself in the subculture.

Nekojiru, Aoyama, my future wife Saki and I all wrote articles for *Dangerous Issue No. 1*.

Wataru Tsurumi, author of the *Complete Manual of Suicide* (1993, Ohta Publishing), which caused quite a stir, and Seino Eiichi, trance DJ and author of *RAVE TRAVELLER: Dancing Traveler* (1997,

same publisher) also wrote for *Dangerous Issue No. 1*.

After Aoyama Masaaki's depression worsened and he stepped down as editor-in-chief after the second volume, I became assistant editor and edited the third volume. However, I stepped down soon after. Volume 4 was produced independently by Data House.

The reason I stepped down from *Dangerous Issue No. 1* was because I was losing interest in the macabre and my readers were becoming more extreme. More extreme than us, the creators.

Once while watching TV, they showed a New Year's card to a friend from Sakakibara Seito, the man who placed a boy's head atop a school gate in Kobe.

The card featured a reproduction of the illustration from Volume 1 of *Dangerous Issue No. 1*.

With shining eyes, Sakakibara Seito and speedfreaks alike were reading something we edited for shits and giggles at work.

I just couldn't stomach it. I couldn't shoulder the burden.

King

Saki and I grew close in 1996, working together on *Bessatsu Takarajima: Cheer Up Medicine*.

She majored in education at Tokyo University but had no intention of pursuing teaching. Instead, she got a job at a textbook publishing company.

She was a high academic with a nerdy personality and eventually became an editor at a small publishing company called Company A. Company A's books were of the cutting-edge sukashi-kei variety that were locally prevalent during the bubble era. They were characterized by their maniacal, highly deviant (and borderline fetishistic) production. The editors passionately created whatever they wanted, and many of them could not have been said to be very popular. This was probably why it best suited Saki, who disliked popular culture. I was working freelance for *Bessatsu Takarajima* at the time and we teamed up to finish a chapter. Saki, meanwhile, had begun working part-time as a writer while still employed at Company A.

Isaki is her pen name. I think she first used it in *Cheer Up Medicine*.

She pretended to be a college student, though in reality she was thirty years old. Before we started dating, she had a "guinea pig conversation" with me about anti-aging drugs and aphrodisiacs.

Yoshinaga: "There was an anti-aging drug for women that said it was 'dangerous because it makes you too tight.' The one that said to use it near a phone so that you'll be able to call 119."

Saki: "It was 'Fuho.' I was too scared to use it. Sorry (laughs)."

Yoshinaga: "You must have spiked someone with it, right? Did you tell her about it later?"

Saki: "I could never tell anyone that."

Saki was quite the "brat." After this job, we became closer. By the following year, 1997, I was working alone on the third volume of *Dangerous Issue No. 1*. After work, I would head to Saki's studio apartment.

On weekends, we'd go to trance parties together while they were still in their infancy. Dancing in a dark club filled with delinquent foreigners only lit by black lights seemed like a new experience for Saki, who'd always hung out with older guys.

I was completely immersed in it. Saki looked like she was having a lot of fun back then. I was having a lot of fun, too. Everything was so lively. The bubble had burst and the Great Recession had begun, but we were still basking in the afterglow. Eventually, we decided to live together and moved into a newly built apartment in Asakusabashi. Its rent was a bit extravagant for me, but Saki really wanted it, so I caved. We still had savings and *Dangerous Issue No. 1* was selling well, so I thought we'd be able to make it.

Nekojiru once asked, "What do you call each other when you're alone?"

"Saki and King," I answered honestly.

"King?!" Nekojiru laughed. "That's a little weird."

When we were alone, Saki called me "King." The apartment was her castle. Saki was, in a sense, a princess.

Perhaps calling me "King" reflected her desire to depend on me.

Psychedelic and Trance

My wife's work as Isaki included co-writing a series on techno and trance music with me for magazines like *Bessatsu Takarajima*, *Dangerous Issue No. 1*, and the delinquent magazine *BURST* (Core Magazine), where tattoos and drugs graced the pages.

In 2002, she single-handedly edited a stylish graphic mook with a yellow vinyl cover called *2-:+/Special Feature Drugs* for a publisher called Studio Parabolica.

This book holds one of my most precious memories.

Around the same time, I also edited a visual mook called *Psychedelic & Trance* (Core Magazine), featuring mesmerizing digital psychedelic art. It was a toy-like book with special 3D glasses.

One summer, while on a date to Odaiba, we passed by Village Vanguard, a subculture store that sold merchandise and books.

"Shall we take a look?" I said. So we went inside. There, I found two copies of *2-:+/…* and *Psychedelic…* stacked side by side.

Saki, upon seeing them, happily exclaimed, "We have matching books!" It felt like they were our children.

I still treasure the book Saki created.

Enlarged yellow-green and brown seashells, with rays of light forming mandalas, adorn the color pages.

The production of Psychedelic & Trance was influenced by drugs. By the brilliant colors and infinitely expanding beauty I saw on an LSD trip.

Heroin, cocaine, marijuana, acid, psychotropic drugs…

The book covered every drug that affects human emotions.

It included a bibliography of specialized books on drugs and records that have been influenced by drugs—for example, it explains how John Lennon's "Tomorrow Never Knows," included on The Beatles' album, *Revolver*, was written based on the hallucinations he experienced when he took LSD as if he were eating three meals a day.

It provided a detailed, beginner-friendly explanation of what drugs are and what drug-influenced culture is like, packaged in stylish feminine aesthetics.

Saki, who had little experience with illegal drugs, must have created this book because of me. She compiled nearly twenty pages using my experience and commissioned a manuscript from a writer friend of mine.

Each graphic was made using things I had laying around at home. I think she was able to create them without spending too much time or money.

This was the last book Saki edited in its entirety. She wrote the following editor's note, in her signature feminine style:

"This is a specially treated cover. Please handle it with care."

The Sound Addict Society

Saki, myself, Aoyama and Nekojiru.

Three suicide victims and I ran in the same circles.

We all made a living in the subculture publishing industry and we were all immersed in the rave culture that began in Japan around 1994.

Author Seino Eiichi wrote the nonfiction book *RAVE TRAVELLER* based on his own experiences, and his novel *Dead End Sky* won the 8th Bugakukai Newcomer Award.

"Raving" refers to collective outdoor dancing.

By dancing mindlessly to music in nature, people can reach religious or spiritual heights. They may even reach a state of natural tripping without the use of drugs.

Rave culture has come to establish a strong set of values among young people.

We'd dance our hearts out in groups at Yoyogi Park.

I went to trance clubs every week, took LSD and danced like a madman. I was sweating buckets and had to keep hydrated. Sometimes my water bill reached 10,000 yen a night. We partied hard.

Saki, Aoyama, Nekojiru and I were all hooked on techno, a genre of electronic music, and psychedelic trance, a type of music synonymous with drugs.

Each of us had our own style of feeling the music even if we were listening to the same songs. Saki and I were the type to dance hard, but Nekojiru and Aoyama weren't the type to dance; they'd sit, close their eyes, and listen intently.

While working in the subculture industry, we frequented clubs and raves, and sometimes held "sound addict" parties in someone's room.

We were a group of people that could lose ourselves in the music. We could listen to music and trip without a care in the world.

An air of excitement, like the dregs of the bubble era enveloped us. I thought our frenzied dancing would last forever. I wasn't thinking about the future.

We danced and danced and danced. Worries, anxieties, anger and grief flew to the wind as we danced the night away.

But we couldn't dance forever.

Nekojiru led the way, and one by one, we lost our enthusiasm. Aoyama followed, and then…

The World is Full of Idiots

Tatsumi Saki was a brilliant young woman.

She was precocious and goal-oriented, only interested in people who were interesting or useful to her.

In the movie *A Town with the Cupola*, there was a scene in which poor Yoshinaga Sayuri checks out a school that she's always dreamed of attending. Saki told me that her father was overjoyed when his daughter got into that school.

She went on to a high school in her hometown of Saitama prefecture.

The girls' school was nationally renowned, with the highest average score among all the prefectural high schools.

Saki was a natural academic.

Her father loved her unconditionally, without understanding her essential individuality. I think he listened to every word she said. That never changed, even up until her death. He doted on his daughter.

Saki's parents spoiled her rotten, saying things like "Saki is smart, honest and cheerful…"

But they didn't show it. They were proud and, in some ways, arrogant.

Saki once said, "Mukai Aki isn't stupid, so why would she go and marry a guy like that?"

Among Saki's upperclassmen in high school was the entertainer Mukai Aki, who underwent a hysterectomy but refused to give up on raising a family and traveled to the United States for a surrogate.

When she held a press conference, Takada Nobuhiko appeared on the TV screen.

Saki loved martial arts, but hated Takada Nobuhiko.

She loved professional wrestling and didn't mind burly men.

"Why do you dislike him?" I asked.

"I don't like his shallow, showy attitude. And he looks really stupid. Tiger Jeet Singh is more mature. He's my type."

I could not believe a villainous wrestler who specializes in saber-wielding attacks was her type.

When I asked if she had any other favorite fighters, she answered, "I like Fujiwara Yoshiaki."

It wasn't that she was trying to impress anyone.

Deep down, Saki loved old-fashioned men. It had nothing to do with looks.

Among baseball players, she said, "Enatsu Yutaka was the best," even though he was once arrested for using stimulants. She was a big fan of Luchino Visconti and Tim Burton films. She watched Visconti's films as if they were boys love. *Death in Venice* and *Family Portrait*. They all featured beautiful gay men. That's what Saki loved about them.

She was tolerant of gays and lesbians. She herself was queer, or rather, bisexual. Her lesbianism seemed to have already begun to blossom in middle school.

Tim Burton's protagonists were always lonely, living on the margins of society. Saki, who hated popular culture, supported his films in which outlaws were the stars.

In return, I introduced her to the works of Terry Gilliam and Paul Verhoeven.

After graduating from high school, she was accepted into the National Academy of Arts and Sciences. Partially to please her parents.

Her parents wanted her to become a teacher.

Saki, however, rebelled before graduating from university, insisting that she wouldn't become a teacher. She compromised and joined a textbook publishing company.

Saki held herself with a sense of elitism and arrogance that made everyone around her seem foolish in comparison.

"No matter where I am, everyone around me seems stupid," she'd say.

Senior employees at the time included the self-proclaimed devilish Murasaki Hyakuro, who would later make his debut as a writer with *Dangerous Issue No. 1* and editor Nicholas Keiji. This was likely one of the most fulfilling periods in her life. Comparing photos from her time at the textbook publishing company with those from after Company A, her gaze appears notably more vacant in the former.

But with the collapse of the bubble economy, publishing companies like Company A became unsustainable, and the company dissolved in spring of 2001. Their somewhat posh approach to creating the cult books they aspired to was no longer possible.

A change came over Saki. She began to realize that her youthful obsession with the posh yet highly perverse micro culture was a "mistake." Company A's sales were poor, and the pay was low. So she began working part-time as a freelance writer. I met Saki when we were both working for Company A and wanted to explore other ventures. We lived in very different worlds, but it was refreshing to share with each other. My influence led Saki to listen to techno and dance to trance. She was particularly receptive to my tastes in music and aesthetics.

She didn't show me her intellectual side too much.

Saki was the daughter of a civil servant, but she'd been raised as a princess. She'd always behaved like a good girl in front of others. It was a strategic act of pretense, and she was a real performer, a demon at heart. She hid her intellect and maintained a cheerful and reserved demeanor. She never revealed her true self in front of anyone. She was always acting, playing the role of "good Saki."

At first, I was fooled by it.

She never talked about challenging books, so she didn't seem particularly smart. But that was because she was accommodating me. In reality, she was much more intelligent than she appeared. When we first started dating, she acted very self-absorbed. But that didn't mean she was that kind of person. She also had a pessimistic side and carried a heavy burden in her heart.

But really, I enjoyed spending time with her. Even if she acted snooty.

Like my family back home, however, I was a little hesitant to call someone who was almost thirty "Saki-chan." So I started calling her "Saki."

The real Saki was a perverted little punk. She was a maniac.

She was queer, or rather bisexual, and loved gay men and yaoi (boys love). She liked androgyny and fringe subcultures, repulsed by anything that appealed to the masses.

She also had a strong interest in terrorism. When the Twin Towers in Manhattan were bombed, she was extremely excited. "Allah is angry," she thought, and began reading books about Islam and the Middle East. Saki was addicted to reading. I imagine it must have been very painful for her when she finally became so depressed that she could no longer read.

She was a narcissist with a high level of self-esteem and pride. She was the type of person who would die for her pride.

Saki's younger brother told me that when she ran for student council president at her junior high school, she staged a public seppuku (disembowelment) in imitation of Yukio Mishima.

Saki was bisexual at that point. She acknowledged this when she started living with me. She told me she became aware of her homosexuality in junior high.

She was the type of genius who worked hard and came out on top in her studies. From junior high onward, she became more precocious and read adult books. Her parents doted on her, so they bought her all the books she wanted. She even had a book by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, which she was obsessed with since junior high.

When I was shown a photo of her in junior high, she had a stiff, belligerent look on her face. Saki was a daddy's girl. She liked older men. That being said, she despised her own father.

Saki behaved in a way that pleased her parents. On top of that, she was very spoiled. Her parents would tell her how cute she was and give her an allowance. Saki thought it was better to act for an allowance, so she did.

She said of her mother, "She's not particularly quick-tempered, but she's honest and a good person." And her younger brother, too, "I wouldn't say he's a genius but he's an honest, straightforward, good kid."

Saki's father was especially fond of her, but she hated him. She acted cheerful and loving despite this. It was all a ruse.

Why did she hate him?

Because he wasn't the man of her dreams. After retiring from the civil service, he worked quietly as an accountant. Saki saw him as a man whose only redeeming quality was his unattractive and earnest nature. Saki hated that type of person. She was a woman who rebelled against the macho, big things of America, and disliked people who followed the latest trends.

I think that's where her eventual decision to become gay came from. She hated anything popular or conformist, like her father was. From my perspective, he was a kind, easy-going man. Now he hates me and calls me a "murderer," but…

Saki was very cute and popular with men.

But her cuteness was only surface level. Maybe she wasn't as pretty on the inside.

"The real me is scary," she'd told me several times.

“I’m holding it in for you. I’m holding it in for everyone. I can’t show the real me, and I won’t, ever. The truth is, I’m scary.”

When Saki was young, she looked at herself objectively and realized something wasn’t right. From then on she decided to always act like a good kid. In later years, she developed a bad habit. Sometimes, when she came home, she would explode.

After it happened a few times, I realized.

Saki was acting. Just acting out, that’s all.

Maybe, just maybe, her “desire to die” that she sometimes expressed might also stem from that same unreasonableness.

I was too oblivious to realize it until she exploded. I guess “not noticing” can be loosely translated as “I was deceived by her act.” It’s a convincing lie, so I feel like I should believe it.

Mistress Nature

Saki, who was a fan of Tiger Jeet Singh, Fujiwara Yoshiaki and Enatsu Yutaka, had relationships with several middle-aged men who had wives and children. She was their mistress.

She also dated a writer who was renowned in the 1960s as an anti-war activist.

I've heard her talk about her trip to America with the writer several times.

She said that she learned to appreciate luxury while being the man's mistress. When a wealthy middle-aged man told Saki to buy a coat she liked, Saki took the plunge and bought a coat worth 300,000 yen using the man's credit card.

When she went to meet him, he looked sad and said, "I was hoping you'd wear something better."

"I regretted it," Saki said. "I hurt him. I should've gone for the three million yen coat instead. I'm ashamed of my cheap taste."

From what Saki told me, other lovers included a reporter for a major newspaper and the owner of an events company.

They were all top-notch, wealthy, eloquent middle-aged men with wives and children.

Of course, I wasn't at all shocked when Saki told me about the men she'd dated in the past. She was mine, after all.

When we fought, Saki said, "You're the man I chose. Why haven't you any confidence?"

It was a pretty arrogant way of putting it.

"You're the man I chose."

Saki stopped seeing middle-aged men and started dating me. The only men who called her home phone were her gay friends. Saki's ideal. A gay man who could love a woman. In order to understand gay people, I wrote a book called *Gay Life Manual* (Data House). The book was a big hit at a bookstore in Shinjuku Ni-Chome.

Saki loved clothes, and owned countless designer items. She preferred cute, unique pieces, and I found some outfits were a little extravagant, like the one with angel wings on the back.

By extravagant, I don't mean extravagantly priced. Don't get me wrong, she knew a lot of really wonderful places with extravagant prices. But she was both a fanatic and avid lover of authenticity. When it came to chocolate, she'd say, "Godiva is already mainstream, but Demel is the best," and her favorite was the Viennese royal purveyor, Cat Tongue Chocolate, which cost 4,000 yen per box.

"We should start by experiencing the real deal," she said, and the first hot spring inn we went to together cost 60,000 yen a night. She was a bit of an aristocrat.

I was born in 1962, and Saki in 1968.

She used to have a boyish haircut, but after she started hanging out with older guys, she'd ask the hairdresser to style her like Shaku Yumiko. Older guys wanted something more feminine. Before that, she had a punk style. She hated school; her family loved her, but they didn't understand her, so she felt lonely. That led her to punk. Her punk spirit remained until the very end, but her style was the complete opposite.

Saki never cooked at all. She was insistent about not cooking. But occasionally, when I made something like curry, she'd gush over how good it was and eat it happily. It's not that she disliked

home-cooked meals. She simply had a strong desire not to cook.

She wasn't interested in local stories like the news cameraman being shot, but she was well-versed in international conflicts. She was always up-to-date on the current situation on the front lines and around the world.

Saki seemed to desire a "climax" like during the final war. She supported the self-determination of the oppressed. Perhaps she fell in love with me because I was a little unusual—in other words, an outcast.

I was anti-Yomiuri, but Saki was even more anti-America. She reasoned that America was making the world worse. She said they were causing harm. I don't know exactly why Saki became anti-American, but I think it was because she saw their brutality. While watching TV, she commented on Bush and Bin Laden, saying "It's a battle between cocaine and heroin. I support heroin."

When a big person bumps into a small person on the street, the smaller person always apologizes. Their size lets them intimidate others. That's why Saki disliked big men. When that man becomes a nation, it becomes America.

On the other hand, a part of Saki admired strong people. She was very dependent. She was smarter than me and had been in relationships with more adults than I had, yet still tried to depend on me. I'm sure that was reflected in the way she called me "King."

Chapter 2: Memories of Nekojiru

May 10, 1998.

Nekojiru passed away.

She committed suicide. She was 5’ 1” and weighed around seventy-five pounds.

She was an androgynous woman with short hair.

Looking back, this was the first suicide of a close, cherished friend and coworker I ever experienced.

Because Nekojiru’s death occurred shortly after hide of X JAPAN’s suicide, and because she used the same method of tying a rope to a doorknob and hanging herself, there was speculation among the press and fans that Nekojiru was inspired by him.

In this chapter, I would like to share everything I know about her death.

Nekojiru as I knew her, an irreplaceable friend who will never return.

Meetings

I first met Nekojiru in 1990.

I was on the rise as both an editor and writer, and I was brimming with energy.
I was interested in everything I saw and heard, enjoyed my work, and my future looked bright. I was

a film buff and a young man on the verge of turning thirty. I'd even dabbled in drugs.

But other than my family issues, I didn't have any particular hangups and was living honestly.

One of the manga magazines I read at the time was *Garo*.

Whenever I found a manga I liked, I'd get in touch with the editorial department and ask to meet the artist so I could feature them in magazines I worked on.

My favorites in *Garo* were the works of Nemoto Takashi and Yamano Hajime. I knew both of them and often asked them to do illustration work for me.

At the time, Yamano Hajime's works were goofy, realistic, end-of-the-century manga about the worldly desires of the poor and foolish.

His absurd, resigned style, which repeatedly portrayed how helpless people are, was not well-received by those with common sense; nonetheless, he attracted a cult following.

For those like myself, who identify as outcasts and harbor resentment, Yamano's manga had a unique, almost healing effect.

"Ah, that's exactly how I feel…" I would mutter to myself as I read.

In 1990, long after my favorite Yamano manga ended publication, his debut work was published in Garo under the Yamano Hajime pen name, featuring the artist "Nekojiru Mama," or "Nekojiru."

It was called *Nekojiru Udon*.

A mother cat appears at an udon shop holding a mewling kitten in her mouth, demanding that he be neutered. The udon shop owner is perplexed and stabs the kitten in the testicles with a knife. The kitten dies. A customer comes in and says, "One bowl of nekojiru udon, please!"

The cat dies, and so does the other customer.

Cute cats and graphic violence.

There was a unique blobbiness to her style. I was charmed by its crudeness. At the same time, I was hypnotized, a feeling similar to schizophrenic madness. It was a shock to the system.

"Oh, Yamano, you've done it again."

With that in mind, I knew I just had to request a manga featuring those striking cats.

When we met at a cafe, Yamano introduced me to his wife. She was a small, thin woman. She had short hair and a boyish look, like something out of a Hagio Moto manga.

“Actually, the cat illustrations were drawn by Chiyomi (Nekojiru’s real name), but I helped out quite a bit too. It was a collaborative project.”

Nekojiru seemed a little shy, but she was friendly towards me.

“My wife is pretty rude to most people. She says things like ‘we don’t get along’ or ‘I don’t like them,’ so I was wondering if this meeting would go well…”

Despite Yamano’s concerns, Nekojiru and I quickly became close friends.

From that point on, we met up frequently but I hardly ever remember her wearing a skirt. Maybe she didn’t even own one.

Shortly after her debut in *Garo*, Nekojiru took the manga industry by storm. One male music journalist even went so far as to say, “After one interview, I was completely smitten.”

Nekojiru was the type of person who seemed like she couldn’t survive without someone taking care of her.

Even though she was such a lovely woman, she harbored a strange desire. A dangerous one.

It was so intense that I was afraid to ask. When I found out, I was left speechless by that murky passion that was so far removed from the Nekojiru I knew.

Taking Up Arms

“I want a knife,” Nekojiru occasionally muttered under her breath.

She was obsessed with the idea of arming herself.

“I want a knife,” she’d say earnestly as she swept on her army jacket.

Nekojiru truly desired a weapon to protect herself.

Having known her, I can understand why. Her desire stemmed from the fact that she disliked everything about people and the world.

The world was probably full of danger for Nekojiru. She couldn’t let her guard down with anyone.

She inevitably sought refuge in her own mind. And when she couldn’t, she wanted a knife.

Nekojiru had other quirks as well.

Like Saki, she was overly critical of others to the point of cruelty, saying X, Y and Z were unacceptable.

She barely ate. She couldn’t eat meat or fish. Even when we went out to eat, she’d only order soup.

One time she visited us, my wife offered her an avocado.

“It’s delicious. Try it.”

Nekojiru studied the fruit curiously.

“Thank you for the meal.”

Nekojiru took a bite.

“Ugh!”

A moment later, she spat out the avocado in disgust.

Nekojiru was perfectly satisfied with a liquid diet.

Her appetite was low, or maybe even nonexistent.

Towards the end, her will to live faded, too.

Like my wife Saki, she didn’t discriminate when it came to love and gender.

I think Nekojiru’s first love was a girl.

In later years, Nekojiru and my wife became very close.

We visited several times as newlyweds.

Saki and Nekojiru immediately hit it off.

We'd all hang out together and talk on the phone.

Nekojiru only accepted my wife because of me. And to my wife, Nekojiru was like a family pet. She was constantly petting Nekojiru.

The sight of them pressed up against each other evoked the delicate feminine softness of a Renoir film. They were radiant.

And now both of them are gone.

Flash of Intuition

As editor of a travel magazine, I decided to serialize Nekojiru's manga, running two pages per issue.

I sensed it best not to micromanage her, so I left her to her own devices. We agreed to stick with

cats in the style of her debut in *Garo*.

Despite my sense of trepidation working with a new artist, Yamano, as co-creator, assured me that he would oversee her work.

Yamano later told me, "Looking back on it, I'm still surprised Nekojiru gave you the green light. That's unusual for her."

I don't really understand why Nekojiru agreed to it, or why she took a liking to me. She generally rejected most people looking to hire her, someone who was picky about who she worked with.

I became one of the few people Nekojiru approved of. Maybe because of my right-braindedness, or maybe because she instinctively realized that I had family issues too. I had a very rough relationship with my parents.

Nekojiru's gaze seemed to pierce through my exterior and straight to my core.

I found that she was very intuitive. I frequently witnessed her flashes of intuition and began to think that she was something of a shaman.

One day, she used her powers on me and proclaimed,

"You won't live past thirty-five."

I was still living in my apartment in Kita, caught up in hard drugs, when Nekojiru muttered those ominous words.

For a moment, everything went black.

Why would I die at thirty-five? Would I be murdered? Would I overdose? Or…

I didn't want to die. Nekojiru's ominous prophecy left me greatly disturbed.

Maybe she'd seen something.

But it turns out that Nekojiru's prediction was directed not at me, but at herself…

I cherished our conversations.

Even though Nekojiru was a shut-in with terrible social skills she somehow grew attached to me.

She had no friends and spent most of her time alone. Strangely enough, she also became friends with an Israeli street vendor.

Even though they could barely communicate, they somehow managed to connect. Nekojiru had

unusually high standards and could be quite difficult to get along with. But she caught the eye of the Israeli street vendor and myself, a freelance writer and editor. Perhaps we were more compatible with the vagabond type than the respectable type.

"What do you think of the manga artist Nemoto Takashi?" I asked her.

"He's my colleague who draws interesting manga," she replied.

While they weren't close, she respected him. Nemoto knew potential when he saw it. He noticed Nekojiru's potential early in her career, even before her official debut.

She had practically no interest in making money. Even after she started drawing manga, she never chased fame.

Was she a humble woman, then? No, not at all. I'd never met someone as wholly selfish before. She was incredibly strong-willed.

Garo didn't pay its artists, so she was used to drawing for free.

"Thank you for being the first person to commission me," Nekojiru said gratefully.

We got along strangely well, and we became close enough to visit each other's homes even if it wasn't to work.

Before I knew it, I'd become her older brother.

Yamano was both mother and father to Nekojiru. She'd call him "mom" and call me her "big brother."

It reminded me of the relationship she had with her real family.

The three of us were like a happy family, even if it was short-lived.

Trip

Nekojiru, Aoyama Masaaki and Isaki. All three of them became acquainted through me.

Nekojiru began drawing manga for *Dangerous Issue No. 1* at my request.

That's how Aoyama and Nekojiru met, and Aoyama ended up writing the commentary for the *Nekojiru Dango* collection (Asahi Sonorama).

That was a decision made by the editor, of course. While Nekojiru and Aoyama met through me, they didn't seem particularly interested in each other.

In the early '90s, Nekojiru was still able to draw manga at her own pace.

I often went to Nekojiru's place and stayed up all night listening to music with her. At the time, I discovered and became obsessed with techno and trance; I'd dance at seedy clubs with foreigners and frequent Goa trance rave parties, which were still in their infancy at the time.

I'd leave with a mountain of techno CDs. Yamano, Nekojiru and I would chat and slip into a "music trip" until dawn.

"Music tripping" happens when you lose yourself in the music.

This was back when I was single, before I married Saki. Nekojiru and I would drink, smoke weed and sink endlessly into the music.

"This is dub. It's a sub genre that grew out of reggae and goes great with weed," I would babble endlessly. "This is German trance. It's characterized by its unapologetic hedonism and shrieking. The 'wailing' is the best part."

We'd lay on the floor and spend all day listening to music.

The occasional sound of delirious laughter. Physical touch. Endless lectures on musical knowledge. Sharing our favorite artists. Life and death.

Time passed slowly before our eyes.

Boarding a little ship, we traveled through time, plunging into the world of music and light.

What a decadent sight that must've been.

Fearless and confident, we became one as the music oozed through my veins.

Psychedelic days and nights. We danced wildly to the music. All our worries of the future melted away as we tripped endlessly.

Nekojiru listened to everything. As her ears gradually became accustomed to techno, her own preferences began to emerge, so she started saying things like, "I like it faster," or "I like it edgy and shrill."

After listening to a variety of music, she determined that Aphex Twin and Hallucinogen, a Goa

trance artist, were the best.

Even among Goa trance, Hallucinogen's songs are particularly well-produced, making them pair great with LSD.

But Nekojiru didn't need it. Her drug of choice was Jack Daniel's.

At first she was amused by the musical complexity and druggy feel of my favorite band, Jam El Mar (one half of the German trance unit Jam & Spoon), but later said she didn't like them because they sounded cheesy and "gay."

Eventually, near the end of our Sound Addict Society meetings, Nekojiru's preferences took priority.

As Goa is basically dance music, I'd flap my hands to it. Nekojiru always watched me intently.

She never danced. She was the type to curl in on herself and get absorbed in her own little world.

Come to think of it, one time while we were "sound addicts," Nekojiru was in a particularly good mood and gave me a Hindu painting she bought in India, even though she cherished it. She could be really generous like that. The painting was used on the back cover of Volume 2 of *Dangerous Issue No. 1*.

Nekojiru traveled to India in 1994. I had actually wanted to tag along but I couldn't find the time, so she went with Yamano.

When she witnessed ascetics idly smoking cannabis in places like Varanasi, she wondered, "Why isn't Japan this laid back?"

Nekojiru had never used drugs in Japan but after trying marijuana in India, she fell in love with its gentle high.

Personal Life

Nekojiru started seeing Yamano because of his work in *Garo*.

She was so moved by his work that she barged into his life one day and refused to leave.

She had just graduated from beauty school, so she was around eighteen or nineteen.

Nekojiru tended to stay holed up in her room, but one day emerged and proclaimed that she wanted to start helping Yamano with his manga. Her art style was completely different from his. Yamano's work is quite detailed, whereas Nekojiru's lineart was bold and childish. Her drawings, however, had a mysterious allure.

Yamano sensed something special in Nekojiru's art. They decided to collaborate on a piece, and that was Nekojiru's debut as a manga artist.

She worked on *Nekojiru Udon* on and off for a while after her debut in *Garo*. I occasionally asked her to draw illustrations and comic strips.

This was the early '90s, before she became pressed with deadlines.

Her works included a story about two cat siblings bullying a dog for no apparent reason, or running to tell their dad about a homeless drunk on the train who ends up vomiting on the dad… It was pure Nekojiru. I was fascinated.

The editors asked us to workshop it into something more mainstream, but I sensed great potential there and let her do as she pleased.

Before she became famous, Nekojiru operated on her own schedule. She'd sometimes stay awake for thirty hours or sleep all day, ignoring her body's natural circadian rhythm.

Nekojiru had a cat. She named him "Nyansuke" and trained him in a way I had never before seen. If he didn't listen to her, she'd whip him over and over. Sometimes she whipped him hard enough that it was unquestionably animal abuse. As a result, he never listened to me or Yamano, but obediently followed Nekojiru's orders.

Believe or not, Nekojiru chased after what she wanted.

She wasn't interested in most people, but when she had her sights set on someone, she went to great lengths to pursue them.

"I once forced a guy I liked to accept my notebook," Nekojiru told me.

Her first target was Sato Kaoru of the Kyoto funk band EP-4. The second was Yamano. Eventually she fell for Aphex Twin.

Nekojiru was very picky about looks. Richard D. James of Aphex Twin wasn't a looker, but he had a certain boyish charm. His music is beautiful at times, violent at others. It really makes you wonder, just how much of this is contrived, and how much is his true self? His music is playful, sinister and free.

Nekojiru first fell in love with Aphex Twin through his music. She was already obsessed by the time

the *Richard D. James Album* came out. It's the one with the creepy cover featuring himself sporting a grin reminiscent of Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. In the end, it was buried in her casket, joining them together forever in accordance with her will.

While passionate about those she was interested in, her appetite for most people was like her appetite for food: non-existent. To her, they were all the same. Celebrities mattered no more to her than her fans. She was equally unpleasant to everyone, purely self-centered. She didn't care for much, and her catchphrases summed it up: "I don't care," and "I don't like it."

Despite a blurb by Hyde of L'Arc-en-Ciel splashed across the cover of her books, and the theory that her death was a copycat suicide of hide from X JAPAN, Nekojiru had no interest in popular music. The idols she worshipped were fringe. She was completely unconcerned with public opinion or popularity.

"Jack Daniel's is so yummy, nya~!" Nekojiru wrote in one of her books. She loved to drink.

She once got drunk at an izakaya and picked a fight when the bartender brought out some grilled sweetfish (on the house, mind you) because, "we didn't order it."

Other than that, she drank in moderation when we visited her house in the early '90s.

When her work blew up around '97-'98, her drinking took a turn for the worse.

Nekojiru had another distinctive personality trait.

She couldn't lie. Lying never even crossed her mind. So she made it clear when she hated something.

I remember being shocked when we went out to a sushi restaurant with some colleagues. I thought the sushi was quite good. As we ate quietly, she suddenly announced, "This roe sucks. I bet it's fake!"

The noisy restaurant went dead silent. The chef, still holding his knife, was stunned.

I froze, helpless.

"I can assure you, it's real…" the chef said after he recovered from the shock.

I played it off with a laugh.

Nekojiru was frank to the point of arrogance.

She called the editorial department of a major publishing company late one night to make a casual request: "Change my editor."

When they asked why, she said, “Because he’s fat.”

She doubled down when pressed further on the matter.

It would’ve been difficult for the editorial department to swap editors without a legitimate reason. I think she got her way in the end.

Nekojiru was endearingly selfish. But she didn’t do it to be mean. Her body would physically reject fat people by sweating profusely whenever she was around them. She was a very sensitive woman, unable to withstand the levels of stress that most could endure.

She was too sensitive.

I imagine the editors of big publishing houses had a really hard time with her. She stuck out like a sore thumb.

She criticized almost everyone around her and shut down when working with people she didn’t like. She must’ve been thought of as unreasonable.

Brimming with natural arrogance, Yamano dubbed her the “Child Queen,” because that’s exactly what she was. Pure, easily hurt, lacking resilience, yet haughty and quick to dismiss what she found “boring.”

If you try to cultivate an environment that suits your every need, you eventually have no choice but to retreat inward.

I’m Not Afraid of Death

Nekojiru was an active suicide risk.

Like Saki, Nekojiru was a proud woman with her own point of view.

Saki was a left-brained genius, while Nekojiru was right-brained with a schizophrenic streak. She

could see things others couldn't. I think we got along so well because of our shared intuition.

Nekojiru's husband, Yamano Hajime, on the other hand, is an upstanding, serious and sensible man.

But Yamano is an enigma, even more so than Nekojiru. I can't believe he'd create manga such as *Sunset on Fourth Street* and *Pangaea, the Continent of Chaos*.

And why, in these divisive times, works are credited to "Nekojiru y" rather than Nekojiru herself.

Yamano uses this pen name when drawing Nekojiru's characters. His work appears similar on the surface, but has its own distinct flair.

Nekojiru often got depressed and would spend time in her room playing *Final Fantasy*.

I don't play video games, but I once played a fighting game with Nekojiru and she tore me to shreds. I had gotten frustrated because I couldn't figure out the controls.

"Hahaha, you're getting so mad!" she laughed.

What caused Nekojiru to retreat into herself?

Looking back, I think she became isolated while still living with her family. By the time I met her, she had completely withdrawn into her own world.

Nekojiru was seeing a psychiatrist. She'd been diagnosed with depression.

"Death doesn't really scare me," she told me on several occasions.

Near the end of the publishing bubble, between 1992 and 1994, sales were still pretty good. I had it made. I was working on the self-described "brutal" subculture magazine, *Dangerous Issue No. 1*, editing and making books for fun, then living off the royalties.

In those days, Nekojiru could work at her own leisure relatively stress-free.

She was more interested in getting together for fun rather than work. She hardly seemed depressed when I saw her. Maybe she was just hiding it.

Things were going well and everyone was still alive, so I couldn't complain.

Listening to our favorite music, dabbling in drugs, shooting the breeze…

The mainstream ambition of the masses—the drive to succeed—may have finally taken root in us.

Aoyama, a hardcore editor and drug writer, had developed a cult following. Like myself, he was riding the wave of the publishing bubble. In that sense, he was the most successful of us all.

However, Nekojiru's popularity exploded at a rate that she herself couldn't believe.

It was the curtain call for her downfall.

The Boom

In the mid '90s, Nekojiru's work suddenly took off.

She became a household name overnight, with everybody dubbing her work "dangerously cute."

Her unique cat drawings appealed to the general public, even if they misunderstood Nekojiru

entirely. That blobby linework was integral to her popularity.

″Abunakawaii (dangerously cute).″ The perfect way to describe Nekojiru's essence.

It's particularly apt for her early works, with their innocent cruelty. It was disturbingly cute, just like Nekojiru herself. And once the public caught wind of it, she became a star.

Gone were the days of the Sound Addict Society.

Saki and I had married already, and Nekojiru and Yamano were too busy to sleep.

Nekojiru marched to the beat of her own drum. She wasn't used to churning out page after page but the boom forced her to.

As she became more popular, she was constantly pressured to meet deadlines. She burned out.

Her work was featured widely from the pages of Garo to commercials for Tokyo Electric Co. There was no way that the fantastical, personal delusions she published on a whim should have become mainstream. But she forced herself to keep drawing in order to curry favor with the big magazines.

Neither Nekojiru nor Yamano could turn down work. They took every job that came their way. They were both very poor, so perhaps a part of them couldn't live with turning down the money. They should've been more selective with the offers they accepted.

Collaboration

The name "Nekojiru" doesn't refer to the late artist Nekojiru alone; more accurately, it encompasses both herself and her collaborator, Yamano. They were a package deal whose works combined Nekojiru's right-brained, intuitive ideas and Yamano's left-brained, logical approach.

The foundation of Nekojiru's work is what appears to her in dreams. Perhaps the underlying theme

of dreams is why her stories feature encounters with outlandish individuals.

For her, the line between dreams and reality was hopelessly blurred. This is likely how her unique worldview emerged.

The inspiration for Nekojiru's stories was based on fact and fiction alike. Her delusions (rather, her strange ideas) were skillfully harnessed by Yamano. It was a balancing act, a tightrope walk to put Nekojiru's trippy ideas into layman's terms without losing that signature Nekojiru feel. The division of labor was unclear; it was hard to tell who did what. Like conjoined twins, there isn't one work that's entirely Nekojiru or entirely Yamano.

There are some works that are more Nekojiru than others. Her early unpaid work for *Garo* and myself (collections like *Nekojiru Udon* and *Jirujiru Diary*) are pure Nekojiru. It's obvious she was coming up with short stories all by herself.

On the other hand, I imagine her later work, which was churned out in a short period of time, had Yamano's fingerprints all over it. With new publishers came new restrictions. There were times where they adapted almost seamlessly, with works like *Neko no Kamisama*. But the more they pushed themselves, the stronger Yamano's presence became.

Especially in stories like *Invisible*, which was published under the "Nekojiru y" name after Nekojiru's passing. Although similar on the surface, Nekojiru and Nekojiru y produce completely different work. They worked as closely as if they were conjoined twins. Now Yamano, stripped of his other half, works alone as Nekojiru y.

Natural Acid

One of her earliest works, *Nekojiru Udon*, is a dangerous read for the faint of heart.

Cat siblings blithely commit massacres. They kill anyone and everyone that rubs them the wrong way. The art is full of cruelty, its only redeeming quality being the cute cat characters. Its style of

writing drips with hatred. Of the self. Of the masses, even.

When featured or reviewed in magazines, Nekojiru's work was often described as having a cult following thanks to its innocently cruel cats. If you dig deeper, however, you can find somewhat of a resignation to life, a fatalist belief that, "we're all gonna die anyway."

Nekojiru's work suddenly gained widespread popularity thanks to its "dangerously cute" vibe. Why else would hundreds of thousands of people flock to it? Rather than resonating with Nekojiru's message of "we're all gonna die anyway," the masses latched onto the powerful aura emitted by her art style. The cat's mysterious allure is ultimately what captured her wide readership.

All of Nekojiru's early works shared this unique, divisive, even trippy feeling. I called it "natural acid."

It's likely that she was playing house through her work. I don't know anything about her family, but she seemed like someone with absolutely no home training. The family depicted in her work wasn't a reflection of her own home life, but of the family she yearned for.

The character Nyako, who frequently appears in her work, is thought to be based on herself, while "Nyasuo" is based on Yamano. However, I don't think Nyatta is necessarily based on her younger brother (she had a younger brother and sister).

In *Nekojiru Travelogue*, included in *Nekojiru Diner*, Nekojiru visits various places. In typical Nekojiru fashion, she says they suck. But the editors really do only send her to places that suck. It's like they were deliberately asking her to write negative reviews.

There's no way Nekojiru would have enjoyed a theme park.

Jirujiru Travelogue: India is, in my opinion, her most accessible work. It captures what she saw there through the prism of her unique point of view. I love this book because it bursts with the romance of travel. In *Psychedelic & Trance*, I had the opportunity to run her manga about her tripping in India after tasting Banglasi (yogurt with cannabis extract).

But the real Nekojiru shines through her late book, *Jirujiru Diary*.

She'd write about the strange things she'd witnessed, such as a woman taking a shit in the middle of the street. I wonder if she actually saw those things happen.

Perhaps she was the only one with eyes to see.

Memories of the Liquid Room

On February 1, 1997, Nekojiru and I went to see Aphex Twin in concert.

I remember it vividly.

The Liquid Room in Kabukicho, Shinjuku's red light district. The venue was packed. There was

barely any room to breathe let alone move.

DJ Cylob was the opening act. I asked Nekojiru what she thought of the music.

“It sucks. Hurry up and finish, dumbass.”

Unusually for the club, about a third of the audience was sitting on the floor. Nekojiru forced her way though the seated crowd and finally made it to the front of the DJ booth. She charged forward, ramming into people left and right. Though normally quiet, small and weak, she had tremendous drive.

Finally Cylob left the DJ booth. Two tracks from Mike (μ-sik) & Richie's album started playing on the speakers. Richard was on.

It's hard to say what Aphex Twin's music is meant for. The venue was split evenly between people dancing and people listening. There may have been even more sitting. Nekojiru was sitting cross-legged, moving her body to the rhythm. Her eyes left the DJ booth for not even a second.

Meanwhile, Richard was hunched over the turntable the whole time. His long hair fell over his face, not caring a bit about the crowd before him.

Behind him, two teddy bears were fighting or, rather, playing with each other. Each bear had a photo of Richard plastered over its face.

After about an hour, Richard abruptly left the stage without a word. Nekojiru came over to where Yamano and I were standing at the back of the crowd.

“I've had enough. Let's go.”

The party was supposed to go all night, but Nekojiru had no interest in the other DJs.

“How was Richard?” I asked.

“He kept his head down the whole time, so I couldn't see his face. But it was good. The bears were a nice touch.”

Nekojiru was always like that. Short and to-the-point. She might sound curt, but she was actually quite passionate. Coming from her, a comment like that meant something like, “Wow, that was so good, I almost pissed myself!!”

In other words, she had fun.

Pandemonium

Towards the end of her life, Nekojiru's workload increased so much that she was beginning to burn out.

She was focusing more on delivering manuscripts on time than drawing for fun.

Jirujiru Diary and *Neko Kamisama* were based on stories she'd heard from others, verbatim.

"I deleted a whole book's worth of data from my computer…" I lamented. And Nekojiru wrote my story into a manga, exactly how it happened.

A young part-timer once took my place at a company event because I was busy and brought back a souvenir. It was a plastic pouch of dried seaweed (the regular kind you can find to sprinkle on breakfast at convenience stores) with five individually wrapped portions inside(!). He handed it to me and said, "Here's a souvenir," and Nekojiru drew it exactly as it was.

Hopelessly overworked, Nekojiru was running out of ideas. But she had deadlines to meet, and pushed herself through it. She had a strong sense of responsibility and just couldn't say no. She was pressed for time and pushed herself past the point of exhaustion.

One time, there was a late-night knock on my door at the office.

"Can I stay the night?" Yamano begged, exhausted.

"What happened?"

"Well…"

Yamano hesitated. Apparently Nekojiru snapped and slashed at him with a box cutter.

I laid Yamano down on the sofa and gave him a glass of water.

Silence hung heavy in the air.

The phone rang. I answered; it was Nekojiru.

"I knew he'd be over there. Put Yasuo [Yamano's real name] on the phone!"

"I can't. He's asleep right now."

I tried to calm her down but nothing worked. "Put Yasuo on the phone right now! He ran out on me. Wake him up and put him on the phone!" She was furious.

Things like this happened frequently when a deadline was drawing near. Two people attached at the hip are bound to clash eventually. It was usually Nekojiru who'd lose it and end up attacking (rather, abusing) Yamano.

Seeing Yamano exhausted, sprawled out on my couch, reminded me of Nekojiru disciplining her cat Nyansuke.

Fearing for Yamano's safety, I refused to let him leave.

Before long, dawn broke. The sparrows began singing and the newspaper delivery truck started making its rounds.

Nekojiru's delirium must have subsided for the time being.

Yamano returned to Nekojiru. "She needs me," he said, leaving me with those final words.

Looking back, their willingness to take any job due to their scarcity mindset is what made them so popular in the first place.

If they had been a little more selective, Nekojiru might've lived a little longer. Then we would've been able to interact with her a little more.

"You guys need to take a break."

One day in 1998, when Nekojiru and Yamano were at their lowest, my wife Saki and I paid them a visit.

This was about three weeks before Nekojiru's suicide.

We sat together and relaxed, listening to music. Nekojiru had a set of specialty Blue Room House Pod speakers. These were excellent speakers, with particularly clear hi-hats and volume.

Nekojiru barely spoke, listening intently to nerve-wracking, shrill techno. Meanwhile, Yamano was still exhausted from meeting the latest round of deadlines, and the pounding bass seemed to be bothering him.

Concerned, I suggested that we listen to something else for a bit and switched to ambient dub. Yamano seemed relieved, but Nekojiru, who was vibing with the frantic, synth-heavy beats, wasn't a fan of slow, soothing dub and remained sulking throughout.

It was as if the psychedelic trance coming through the House Pod speakers only further agitated her.

Nekojiru seemed in an unusually bad mood that day.

Suddenly I became uneasy when I remembered Nekojiru saying, "Death doesn't really scare me."

As we left, Yamano and Nekojiru saw us off. I can still remember the look of pure exhaustion in Yamano's eyes.

"Don't go home! Stay a little longer! Don't leave us alone!" his eyes pleaded.

They would return to working hellishly.

The final curtain call was fast approaching.

The Face of Death

“Chiyomi committed suicide. You’re one of her only friends, so I thought you should know.”

I learned of Nekojiru’s death via a phone call from Yamano.

By the time they found her body rigor mortis had already set in. I learned of her death only a few

hours after she was discovered.

My wife and I were in Shinjuku, about to catch an IMAX movie when we received the call.

Yamano was in shock. He was trying to put on a brave face.

I had a feeling this day might come, but I never thought she'd actually go through with it.

We put the movie on hold and rushed to Yamano's place.

I was more worried for Yamano, who had been left behind, than Nekojiru. For those of us who are still alive, losing one's wife to suicide is an overwhelming shock. I couldn't imagine it at the time, but I felt that comforting the living should take priority over funerary arrangements for the dead.

Nekojiru's expression was calm. She didn't appear to be in any pain at all. No regrets, not in the slightest. She finally looked at peace.

It made sense to me, but also terrified me.

A CD and video of Aphex Twin were placed in her casket.

Aphex Twin's *Ambient Works II* was played at her funeral.

It was in accordance with the will she had written while she was alive.

Although originally a suicide note, it was workshopped into a proper will over years of failed attempts and plans. Her last will was dated from several years prior.

At Yamano's discretion, however, not everything was done in accordance to her will.

Nekojiru didn't want a headstone. Yamano decided otherwise, as it was necessary for family to visit. However, in a final act of defiance, there's no name on the tombstone.

Only a single Sanskrit character is carved.

I once asked Yamano what it meant, but have since forgotten.

The will included a passage that said, "Never speak of the motive for my death."

Yamano has consistently refused interviews.

Yamano's state at the time was so painful that I couldn't bear to witness it.
To think that five years later, I'd find myself in Yamano's position…

Those Who Choose to Die and Those Who Choose to Live

Suicide hurts those who survive.

The pain cuts so deeply it never goes away.

Yet Yamano somehow managed to hold on.

As the Nekojiru duo took off and became busy, they became as inseparable as Siamese twins. The only way to come between them was to rip them apart. To do so would kill them both, as one can't survive without the other.

The pain of losing one's other half must have been unbearable for Yamano.

After Nekojiru's death, her other half continued publishing under the pen name Nekojiru y. Though identical on the surface, the difference in Yamano's work and Nekojiru's is stark. Yamano is among the living. There's no call of the void.

Many readers only discovered the world of Nekojiru after Nekojiru herself was gone. Those who read *Nekojiru* from the beginning may find the world of Nekojiru y to be unsatisfying. It was devoid of her nihilism, her longing for death. But I suppose it's healthier that way.

Yamano was healing. And that's why he could no longer draw the gruesome works of his past. He had grown beyond that negativity.

Five years later, when my wife committed suicide in the fall of 2003, Yamano was the one who saved me. Perhaps he was the only person to understand how fragile I was. And he guided me, on the brink of a nervous breakdown, back to sanity.

Yamano had recovered. That was a great comfort to me.

Kill or Die

Nekojiru's suicide received extensive media coverage.

Since her suicide came shortly after that of X JAPAN's hide, newspapers and magazines covered it as the death of a celebrity.

"...There has been idle speculation that she was following in the footsteps of hide, but I've never

known her to be a fan of his. Besides, she isn't the type to copy other people."

Thus said a manga magazine editor in reference to manga artist Nekojiru (real name Hashiguchi Chiyomi, age thirty-one), who hanged herself from a doorknob on May 10th, 1998. The only thing she seemed to have in common with hide was a bright future ahead.

Nekojiru began drawing after marrying manga artist Yamano Hajime (age thirty-seven). Her cute cat characters and jarring cruel stories quickly garnered her popularity. She created commercials for Tokyo Electric, and she was expected to flourish.

The editor continues, "However, if you read her work, you'll see that she was pessimistic with a strong tendency to self-destruct. In her most recent release, she writes about how Earth is destined to be destroyed anyway, and laughs about how she nearly lost her mind after eating hallucinogenic mushrooms in Bali. She was clearly on her last legs."

If only she was as carefree as the cats in her manga…

What drove her to death?

Being overworked certainly didn't help. Pandering to big magazines must have been stressful, too. It wasn't surprising it made her depressed.

"Death is the only option" was a common theme in her work. Her general lack of regrets. Those were obvious red flags.

Nekojiru was the purest person I knew. My wife called her "authentic." Pure, psychotic, shamanistic—essentially natural acid. This is what comes to mind when I think of her. It may have been difficult for someone so pure and innocent to live in this world.

In the eight short years that I knew her, Nekojiru's appearance and behavior hadn't changed a bit. Most women matured, but Nekojiru refused to grow old.

Sales of Nekojiru merch exploded after her death. Dying made her a hit. In the end, I don't think it would have mattered to her.

In the end, the living can never understand what motivated the dead to take their lives.

I'm surprised she even made it to thirty-one. I think Yamano was the only thing keeping her alive.

In the end, she died because she wanted to. Simple as that.

No attachments to life. As refreshing as it could be at times, it was scary at others. I wanted to live life full of hedonism, so encountering someone unafraid of death was unnerving. But Nekojiru seemed at peace with this world. Maybe she didn't need anything from it anymore.

She wrung herself dry then went up in smoke. A clean break. There was something frighteningly elegant in her death.

Perhaps she was preaching her gospel through her work.

“Kill or die.”

There was only one way out. The solution was obvious.

Memories of a Rave

There’s one memory of Nekojiru I’ll never forget.

I once overdosed at a Goa trance rave. I was in really bad shape.

Concerned, Nekojiru called an ambulance and anxiously waited for my return at the venue.

The friends that came with me, Aoyama Masaaki and Tsurumi Wataru, had bailed, likely fearing arrest. (Earlier this year, Tsurumi called me and protested, “I didn’t run away! Aoyama dipped and dragged me out without explaining a thing.” He never lies, so I believe him.)

Nekojiru might not have been afraid of dying, but she didn’t want her friends to die, either. She was selfish, but kind.

After being released from the hospital, I went to an onsen with Nekojiru and Yamano.

I came to my senses in our room. I was grateful to be alive, but terrified and profoundly alone. I’m prone to depression, too. And so, in that quiet onsen, I finally broke down in tears. I couldn’t help it.

“Why are you crying?” Nekojiru came to my side with a worried frown. She stayed with me for a long time.

Perhaps she thought I’d kill myself if she left me alone.

“Are you alright?”

Crying with my knees hugged to my chest, I had no idea how to respond.

How could she have taken her life when she cared so much about me?

I ask Saki and Nekojiru both.

Why did they have to die so soon, when the people they cared about had always been by their side?

I hesitate to accept the idea that they took the easy way out.

Despite her wishes, Nekojiru exploded in popularity. She accepted every job, worked herself to the bone, and made a lot of money over the years. But none of it mattered to her. Nothing mattered to her. She said I’d die at thirty-five; maybe that’s why she grew fond of me. Because I, like herself, am on the verge of death.

But I just act crazy. I don’t want to die.

Chapter 3: Memories of Aoyama Masaaki

Keio Boy

June 17, 2001.

Aoyama Masaaki, a charismatic editor, subculture writer and eccentric, died today. He was forty years old. He committed suicide.

Born June 27, 1960, in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture. His real name was Otsuka Masami.

He was ten days shy of turning forty-one, and his death came far too early.

He was a mutual acquaintance of Isaki, myself and Nekojiru.

He was a professional mentor whom I deeply respected.

I have seen the deaths of Nekojiru, Aoyama and Isaki, in that order.

Three talented people. Sensitive, unique, gentle, self-aware and vulnerable people.

Aoyama Masaaki, with his deep knowledge of psychotropic drugs, has a cult following to this day.

His articles and edited books have garnered a legion of devoted readers and remain highly sought-after.

Aoyama was born an only child, with a doting mother and a father who served in the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

Though he never studied, he was known among his peers to be a child prodigy. In the second grade, he was known for being able to recite his times tables in twenty-five seconds.

In the third grade, his father bought him *Supernatural Mysteries*, a children's book by Minamiyama Hiroshi. This sparked an interest in the supernatural, the occult, and other paranormal phenomena. It was around this time that he was deeply moved by Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song."

By the time junior high rolled around, Alice Cooper had become Aoyama's god. Influenced by the rise of glam rock in the early '70s, Aoyama began importing records such as *School's Out*.

He was a genius. He ranked first in Kanagawa Prefecture's mock entrance exams two years in a row. His teacher even gave him the thumbs-up, telling him he had a bright future ahead of him as a doctor or a public speaker.

Aoyama could often be found in the library, immersed in poetry collections, such as the works of William Blake. He later became obsessed with progressive rock during high school and stopped studying altogether. His grades dropped.

Despite this, he was accepted into Keio University's School of Law while still in high school. Thus he joined the ranks of the Keio boys.

It was around this time that the name Aoyama Masaaki began to surface.

The Lost Student Magazine

In 1981, Aoyama teamed up with friends to edit and launch the student magazine *Mutation*. Its unconventional, taboo-breaking content garnered wide acclaim.

Themes such as eroguro, freaks of nature, dead bodies, drugs, lolicon and bigotry were tackled in witty and original writing. He even pulled risque stunts like sneaking into an elementary school with a hidden camera and solving a hate speech-themed crossword puzzle that produced a photo of the

Crown Prince of Japan. His youthful energy and vibrant graphics stimulated the dark, morbid curiosity lurking within people's hearts. It's said that a writer's essence is captured in their debut work, and the true essence of Aoyama Masaaki, who later pioneered the kichiku (devilish) kei craze, blossomed during his school days.

Editor-in-Chief Aoyama Masaaki's afterword in his inaugural issue read,

"In my opinion, radicalism is the only way forward. How can we express that with a magazine? Let's start by making people angry."

The fact that they published images of deformed bodies stirred controversy.

When this zine became a hot topic among fans of the eccentric, Shiina Makoto (who was popular at the time for his frivolous Showa-era style) denounced it in *Asahi Shimbun*, saying, "This shouldn't be tolerated," further spreading the name of *Mutation* and Aoyama Masaaki far and wide.

Aoyama later challenged Shiina to a duel in an article in *Weekly Playboy*, saying he'd meet him outside the giraffe exhibit at Ueno Zoo, but Shiina never showed.

Aoyama was a genius at finding beauty in the macabre. He began writing for adult magazines like *Hey! Buddy* and *Billy* (both published by Byakuya Shobo) while still a student, and made a name for himself as a perverted writer.

Frequent topics included articles on drugs, lolicons and cult films, but with the rise of otaku culture in the early '80s came a demand for lolicon-centric content.

Aoyama's name became synonymous with lolicon, hard drugs and all things degenerate. He became a writer for another world.

Launch of an Overseas Travel Magazine

I first met Aoyama in 1989.

At the time, I was an editor and writer. I was editing an adult magazine, and one of my writers was Aoyama, who was working for a stock information magazine called *Industry and Economy*.

I often went to Kabutocho, where Aoyama worked, to pick up manuscripts. Both of us were

unsatisfied with our lives at the time.

Through avant-garde musician Akita Masami of Merzbow, we learned of an opportunity to launch a new magazine.

A thriving Nagoya-based telephone sales company was looking to enter the publishing business in Tokyo. They were recruiting editorial staff.

Aoyama and I both jumped at the chance. Writer Yasunori Goan and editor S joined us. We formed an editorial team of four people from the world of underground publishing.

Leading us was M, president and editor-in-chief, who had come from our magazine's parent company. And that's how *Eccentric* was born.

It was a visually striking travel magazine that pioneered the likes of *03* (Shincho-sha) and *Gulliver* (Magazine House). The rest of the content covered our specialty: underground subculture.

We lived in a bubble. For the overseas features, we were hooked up with airlines and hotels if we sold it well to upper management.

We just assumed that was how it always worked. All you needed was the right pitch for the places you wanted to go, and off you went, no questions asked. We traveled the world on the company's dime.

Eccentric featured places like New York, Bali, Hong Kong, California and London. It ceased publication after the Bangkok feature.

The reason? Money.

We sold the magazine directly through bookstores. We were responsible for collecting sales revenue along with any returned copies. There was no way a major publication would turn a profit with such a labor-intensive process.

At first we'd take the mountains of returned books back to the editorial department, but this became too much of a hassle, and in the end we just dumped them in the trash cans right outside the store.

Eccentric was essentially a zine. The most expensive zine in Japan.

It was an experience.

Using other people's money, we could make whatever we wanted without any restrictions. We had our hands full, but we also had a lot of fun.

It was in this editorial department that I first learned to edit independently and of my own volition.

Working at the same desk as Aoyama and Yasunori was an incredible learning experience.

The other day, I had the opportunity to speak with M, who was president at the time.

“Yeah, we lost about 100 million yen, but it sure was fun.”

A magazine like *Eccentric* could have only existed during the publishing bubble.

Those were the golden days. Aoyama and I were both so young.

Passionate Work Days

Thus *Eccentric* was discontinued and the editorial department disbanded.

Since we were already together, we decided to form our own editorial team. For a while, we shared an office and collaborated on projects like a package tour magazine (for which we commissioned Nekojiru’s illustrations for the first time) and a university entrance exam information magazine. We made a decent living that way.

It's funny to think Aoyama was penning articles saying, "Do your best for your university entrance exams."

He was working quietly at the desk next to mine, his face dead serious.

Work piled up, and we pulled all-nighters to get it done.

Before long, the night was over, and the pale orange morning sun poured down on us through the window.

"I can't believe it's morning," I said as I stretched.

"Yeah. We've been working hard…" Aoyama said, stretching his legs. "Shall we get breakfast?"

"Yep." I searched the office kitchen, starving.

"There's some Akai Kitsune in the cupboard."

When I opened it, I found over a dozen instant udon packages stored there, as if stockpiled.

It was his strange addiction. He told me he'd eaten it almost every day since high school.

We boiled the water and feasted over the sizzling stove.

Instant noodles are a perfect match for an empty stomach. It tasted so good, I wondered if anything could beat it.

To think we derived so much pleasure from instant noodles.

When we opened the window, the sound of sparrows chirping filled the air.

We were so busy with our work that we didn't have time to play, but we were content.

In addition to the work we took on as a team, we each did other jobs as writers and editors.

I worked as an editor for *Recruit* magazine while Aoyama wrote scripts for cult films.

We had steady work and a decent income. It was the peak of our publishing bubble. We worked hard and partied harder.

Some of the projects that Aoyama and I collaborated on in the early '90s included *Eccentric* (1990, Zenkoku-sha), *Bessatsu Takarajima: Thailand Reader* (1992, Takarajima-sha), and Volume 1 of *Dangerous Issue No. 1* (1995, Data House).

He met Nekojiru and Isaki through me.

I commissioned Nekojiru to draw manga for mooks edited by Aoyama, and Aoyama would write positive reviews of Nekojiru's books in return.

Both Saki and Nekojiru had known and admired Aoyama, the king of kichiku-kei.

Being two years my senior, Aoyama Masaaki was like an older brother to me.

He influenced both my work and drug use. He wasn't the type to lead by example, so I took it upon myself to imitate his outstanding editing style.

He became my role model. Aoyama's writing was carefully refined, logically sound and, most importantly, entertaining.

Aoyama was in good health, working hard as both an editor and writer, and traveling to Thailand almost every month.

His reason? Heroin and hookers.

The Bubble Bursts, and the Market Stalls

The publishing boom was gradually beginning to recede.

First we were let go from the university entrance exam information magazine. Then went the recruitment magazine.

Yasunori had left the editorial department at this point. So Aoyama and the rest of us went to pitch our ideas to *Bessatsu Takarajima*, which was thriving in the subculture scene at the time.

We received the green light for an entire issue based on the overseas travel section of *Eccentric*. Its theme? Thailand.

The product? *Bessatsu Takarajima: Thailand Reader*. Aoyama, S and myself handled the manuscript, writing it based on two weeks of on-site research.

This book is filled with fond memories. Good sales were a bonus.

"Is it really okay to turn what I love into work?" I wondered to myself.

Around this time, our editorial team began going by "Tokyo Koshi."

The name comes from Bangkok Kosi, a high-end massage parlor in Thailand.

In 1992, Aoyama self-published *Dangerous Drugs* through Data House.

It was like a culmination of his drug experiences up to that point. It flew off the shelves from day one, and went on to sell over 150,000 copies, an unheard of sales figure for a book of its nature.

A longtime bestseller, *Dangerous Drugs* became a bible for addicts and users, revered as a legendary text.

"All accounts verified by the author!" boasts the cover.

The book's success earned him the reputation of an iconic drug writer.

While he appreciated the recognition, his unfiltered drug-taking exploits got him into trouble with law enforcement. Around 1993, when he was publishing "Ura Hawaii Reader" in *Bessatsu Takarajima*, Aoyama experienced a sharp decline in popularity.

He became an addict.

He was into heroin, cocaine and stimulants.

He also used the now-illegal GHB in combination with melatonin to sleep. For a normal person, a teaspoon of GHB and two to five melatonin tablets would be enough. But Aoyama would down fifty melatonin tablets with a whole bottle of GHB. He would then vomit it all up.

He feared nothing when it came to drugs. I still wonder how he survived so long with such reckless behavior.

Before long, Aoyama's writing output had steadily declined.

One day, he just up and vanished. He was battling addiction, on the brink of divorce from his first wife, his energy sapped.

If *Thailand Reader* was roughly fifty percent Aoyama, thirty percent Yoshinaga and twenty percent S, *Ura Hawaii Reader* was more like eighty percent Yoshinaga and twenty percent Aoyama (and even that's being generous).

Aoyama got divorced, Tokyo Koshi was laying low, and Data House, the publisher of *Johnny & Associates*, offered to meet us in the middle.

The First Publication of *Dangerous Issue No. 1*

In 1995, we set up shop in Shibuya. With Data House as our sponsor, we resumed editing as Tokyo Koshi, releasing the first volume of *Dangerous Issue No. 1*.

It was a brutal magazine, with Aoyama's signature flair boosting our profile. *Dangerous Issue No. 1* was published annually, with Aoyama as editor-in-chief and myself as assistant editor-in-chief.

Aoyama made the following statement to the media:

"The stories being put out these days are ridiculous. They're dull. We have the right to imagine. I intend to present a new story that doesn't fit the media's narrative. We can't control what we think, no matter how egregious our thoughts are. This magazine is a place of freedom."

"*Studio Voice* and *SWITCH* are pretentious and boring. We need to communicate in ways that are more interesting and easy to understand."

He said the same to me.

The contents of the inaugural issue of *Dangerous Issue No. 1* were as follows:

"Special Feature: Drugs," "Tokyo Hitman Information," "Corpse Disposal Manual," "Garbage Hunting," "True Crime," "Recommendations for Idle Sleep."

Tokyo Koshi became somewhat of the editorial department for *Dangerous Issue No. 1*.

It'd eventually become a big hit, selling over 150,000 copies and pioneering kichiku-kei, the subculture that deliberately sought to expose the seedy underbelly of society at its most depraved.

Aoyama himself was the mastermind behind it all.

Lolicon and Mama's Boy

Aoyama and I were busier than ever.

Since sadomasochism and drugs were in our blood, we pushed ourselves just as hard.

Aoyama conducted interviews, wrote articles, and edited like a madman. In May 1990, he traveled to Thailand to do research for the local corpse-on-parade magazine, *Achaayagam*.

Though Thailand is a Buddhist country, gory magazines are readily available in bookstores, and they sell quite well. Just as there are volunteers who clean up bloody, dismembered and rotting bodies at the scenes of traffic accidents and murders, there are those who take photos to publish in magazines.

This is why a majority of the corpse photos commonly seen in Japan were taken in Thailand. For Aoyama, a lover of lolicons, junkies and freaks, Thailand was the ideal kingdom to satisfy his morbid curiosity.

He even used a photo of a Thai girl he messed around with on the cover of a book.

After Aoyama turned thirty, he got into ethno pop (world music) and became deeply immersed in house and techno.

In 1993, he began following the German and Goa trance scenes I had become obsessed with at the clubs in Nishi-Azabu. He was obsessed with techno, and spent every penny he earned buying forty to fifty CDs a month.

And when he found the time, he'd fly to Thailand.

A lolicon junkie freak—that's how people described Aoyama Masaaki.

But he had a softer side, too.

Aoyama was a raging mothercon. So much so that those who knew him well would refer to him as "the lolicon junkie mama's boy."

Lolicon and mothercon may seem like opposite ends of the spectrum, but even they can coexist. For Aoyama, whose blood flowed with romance, they did.

He married twice, and lived with his parents throughout both. When there was friction between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, he left his parents to live with his wives. But before he knew it, he had returned to his parents' home.

"Who will you choose, me or your mother?"

When both of his ex-wives asked him, he always replied, "My mother."

Violation of the Cannabis Control Act

Early July, 1995.

In the middle of an all-night editing session of *Dangerous Issue No. 1*, shit hit the fan.

“We’ve got trouble! Aoyama’s been arrested!”

It was a call from someone at work.

I had a feeling this day would come, but when it did, I almost thought I’d drifted off into a dream.

Aoyama Masaaki, who’d written extensively about his drug use, was probably someone the police were dying to catch. He was charged with violating the Cannabis Control Act.

With Aoyama gone, would we see publication? This was bad…

Aoyama’s arrest left me feeling on edge, as if I was next.

Still, I had to finish this book before the rapidly-approaching release date by any means necessary.

I had no choice but to visit him at the Tsukuji Police Detention Center and later at the Tokyo Detention Center in Kosuge, where he’d been transferred.

Aoyama looked pale and haggard.

I forced a smile. “The editing is going well.”

Discussing *Dangerous Issue No. 1* in front of a police officer was awkward, to say the least. Articles included “The Right Way to Quit Stimulants” and “The Relationship Between Ecstasy and Rave Culture,” so we spoke in riddles to avoid arousing suspicion.

Something that sold me on Aoyama’s affinity for his mother was what happened after Aoyama was arrested for marijuana possession.

She called the office.

“Just come to the house.”

When I arrived, she said, “When I visited Masami [Aoyama’s real name] today, he told me to dispose of something behind his bookshelf.” She handed me a package, and I took a peek inside.

“Whoa!” I choked, surprised.

What on earth is this…?

To the untrained eye, they looked like research chemicals.

But it was heroin, cocaine, stimulants, ecstasy, marijuana…

This would be a harrowing discovery during a raid. Either way, I found it amazing that a man and his mother could relay urgent messages through police-supervised visits alone.

I was overwhelmed with editing *Dangerous Issue No. 1* at the time, so I left the package at the office. I was pretty annoyed when Aoyama hounded me about returning it to him later…

He was a spoiled only child. His parents never scolded him. To them, he was free to do as he pleased. He had never needed to develop self-discipline. He was dependent on his mother, who loved and accepted him unconditionally. Living with his wife meant living responsibly, which Aoyama couldn't do unless he was under his parents' roof.

He just couldn't stay away from them.

State of Enlightenment

Miraculously, Volume 1 of *Dangerous Issue No. 1* was completed without Aoyama, and released in mid-July.

"I did it." I showed the book to Aoyama during a visit at the Tokyo Detention Center. I had to

sneak it in because of its feature on drugs. Aoyama was delighted when he saw it in person. Afterward, he was given a suspended sentence and released. He called me to his office, took ecstasy and LSD, and was off clubbing that same night.

"Hasn't he learned anything?" I thought to myself.

But in reality, the experience of his arrest loomed large in Aoyama's mind for years to come, suffocating him. Maybe it was even a distant cause of his depression.

Then came the summer of 1999.

Dangerous Issue No. 1 finally came to an end with its fourth volume, *The Complete Works of Aoyama Masaaki*. It went out with a bang, tackling a wide variety of Aoyama-esque work, from nuclear fusion to prostituting young girls. "I'm a pathetic guy who slacked off for eight months of the year and finished the book in two," Aoyama said self-deprecatingly. "I've accelerated my journey to enlightenment. I've decided to change direction with this final book…"

"I'd also like to dedicate this book to my past self, banish it into nothingness (I've had enough of the 'dangerous' stuff, so I'll leave that to *Dangerous Issue No. 28*), and conclude by devoting my entire heart and soul to developing and spreading the gospel through novels, philosophical books, workshops and more."

At first glance, it seemed like a solemn vow. But to me, it sounded like an excuse to continue using drugs.

I worked with Aoyama for over ten years, but grew somewhat estranged from him towards the end. He became completely withdrawn, confined to his home, without working or seeing anyone.

Sales of *Dangerous Issue No. 1* were quite strong (each volume eventually sold over 100,000 copies), so it was obviously time to release a third volume. I took over as editor-in-chief and enlisted freelance editor Nicholas Keiji to help create the book.

It sold well, but like Aoyama, I found the job extremely demanding and stepped down as editor after the third volume was released.

True crime, drugs, freaks… Creating a book with bizarre themes is fun, but mentally taxing.

Out of nowhere, Aoyama signed a publishing contract with Data House without consulting the members of Tokyo Koshi.

Pushed to my breaking point, I ended up crying to Data House's president, Uno. Soon enough, Tokyo Koshi was absorbed into Data House, and I was the only one left working freelance.

We were nearing the end of the publishing bubble, and I was confident (deluded, rather) that I could make it on my own.

After producing the second volume of *Dangerous Issue No. 1*, Aoyama married a second time to a fan a generation younger than him. He left the house less and less. This was the beginning of his withdrawal.

The brilliant Aoyama became deeply sedated, and perhaps convinced that the world of sleep was his only reprieve. He closed himself off from the world around him.

Reclusive Days

"The 24-Hour Worry Factory"—that's the nickname we gave Aoyama back then.

He was always worried about something. His health, his work, his women, his drugs… on the surface, it was almost comical to watch him invent one worry after the other and use them all as

an excuse to withdraw. His tendency to worry extended to his interpersonal relationships; despite being perfectly capable in many ways, he felt inferior to others.

"Yoshinaga, I can never compare to Yamagata Hiro or Yanagishita Kiichiro," he'd tell me. "I realized that after meeting them in person. I just can't compete."

He had quite the inferiority complex.

It's because of it that he was always picking jobs that weren't suited to him.

At the end of 1997, Aoyama married one of his fans. She was a keen, right-brained young woman.

He fell into a severe depression shortly after.

Everyone goes through rough patches following a marriage. Anxiety about adjusting to new life changes may be a catalyst.

Aoyama became near bedridden. His young wife became his caregiver and the main breadwinner during spells of unemployment.

Every now and then he'd ask his ex-wife for money. She didn't hate him. She divorced him as a wake-up call. They remained close even after the divorce.

Due to Aoyama's withdrawal, I was forced to complete the third volume of *Dangerous Issue No. 1* on my own. I was so busy with work that we grew apart.

In the summer of 1997, I began working on personal books after stepping down as editor-in-chief.

With nobody to lead the project, Data House compiled *Dangerous Issue No. 1, Volume 4: The Complete Works of Aoyama Masaaki*. The book was made at the request of Data House's president, Uno. It was essentially Aoyama's second and final solo product. Aoyama further receded and quit working for Data House. The intense highs and lows of drug use likely worsened his depression. The 24-Hour Worry Factory was working overtime.

"If I can't make a living as a writer, I'll get a real job." With that in mind, he began searching for work outside of the media industry.

"Where are you working now?" I asked.

"A bread-making factory," Aoyama replied with a timid smile.

I had no idea how to encourage him.

I highly doubted that someone as weak as Aoyama could work a labor-intensive job at a factory. It was probably a struggle to work there and only further lowered his spirits.

He didn't last long (and quit, in fact, after one day, but told an interviewer that he hadn't) and retreated to the safety of his parents' house.

He was a heavy sleeper since elementary school, and slept even more as an adult. He slept so much that his second wife found mushrooms growing inside his futon (this is a true story). His drug use affected his sleep schedule so much that he decided to study sleep. One could say he was obsessed with it.

But nothing would change unless he stopped using.

People can train themselves to fall asleep on a different schedule, but it may not come easy. Chemicals make it easier, sure, but following the body's circadian rhythm is best.

Debt, Divorce, Depression

Aoyama spent his days alone, struggling with depression.

He retreated into his own little world. I barely saw him.

He didn't do anything productive near the end, apart from marrying again. He ended up divorcing

his second wife and immersing himself in books about spirituality and drugs. I'd never seen such a clear-cut case of depression before.

Nobody saw him during those days, so we can only imagine what he was like. He began living with his mother at his parents' house. His father had passed away.

In Aoyama's case, drugs played a major role in his path to suicide.

He was using in moderation during the publication of *Thailand Reader* and *Dangerous Issue No. 1*. He'd take stimulants to give him a boost at work. He'd take acid (LSD) to go clubbing. He only smoked weed in front of his first wife.

But around the time of his first divorce, he started using drugs as an escape.

He'd take them to forget his worries. He'd feel relief, but only briefly. As soon as the high wore off, he'd rebound and end up bedridden again. It was a deadly cycle.

I think his drugs of choice were stimulants and heroin. Recreational drugs like LSD and ecstasy don't provide much of an escape. Stimulants and heroin, on the other hand, make you lose track of time and leave you feeling good. They're the perfect escape.

In the later years, he became a walking anti-drug PSA. It's one thing to use them recreationally, but turning to them for reprieve can only end in disaster.

He was a total recluse in his final days. He did nothing but withdraw.

He didn't have a job, so he had no income. He borrowed drug money from his ex-wife and his acquaintances. But eventually they stopped enabling him. So he turned to shady, high-interest loan sharks to get his fix.

He fell into a panic near the end of the cycle. Overwhelmed by his debt, his divorce, his inability to work, his depression, and a dispute with a colleague. It all came to a head and he had a breakthrough; he was going to get clean.

His second wife and mother warmly provided him with food, clothing and shelter.

Liar

One of the underlying causes of Aoyama's depression may have been his contraction of APMPPE, an eye disease that affected a mere fifty people nationwide in November of 1994. Overcome by his fear of blindness, he threw himself into recovery.

Aoyama was a delicate,sensitive person. Believe or not, he had an innocent side. He wasn't a

pervert, but rather a man with perverse interests. An innocent man who studied bigotry, deformities, drugs and lolicon. He was far too gentle to be called truly evil.

Even during the kichiku-kei craze, he was conflicted. "I'm not really dangerous. It's a joke, but people are calling me hardcore for real." He never resigned to his fate and constantly worried about his reputation.

The year before he committed suicide, in a *BURST* interview with Hirano Yu, owner of the live venue Loft Plus One, Aoyama said the following:

"I haven't touched drugs in five years. That's because I don't want to end up behind bars again! But let it be known that if drugs were legal and I couldn't get caught, I wouldn't mind doing them." (September 2002 issue)

This was a stretch.

Aoyama never quit using. He continued to use alone for fear of being arrested again.

"I think drugs, if used properly, are as safe as alcohol. Heroin is an exception, though."

Despite Aoyama's words, he hid until the very end the fact that he was hopelessly addicted to heroin, the most dangerous drug of them all. He was a man of great intellect, but he was missing the point.

"Yoshinaga says he's smart because his writing is interesting, but I don't think that's the case," his first wife said.

He was childish. He only wanted to be loved by everyone. During his conversation with Hirano, Aoyama was asked, "If your child or the child of a close friend were addicted to drugs, how would you react?"

"I'd say it's time to quit. It'll kill them if they start early. How would I make them quit? By talking to them. Persuade them, completely change their social circle and environment if you have to. The problem is that there are legal drugs ruining lives the same exact way. Once someone's addicted, that's the only way to help them."

Contrary to his word, Aoyama continued to use.

Of all drugs, stimulants and heroin are probably the most deadly.

Stimulants are uppers that get you buzzed, while heroin is a downer that relaxes you. Using both at the same time can send someone on an emotional rollercoaster. Aoyama himself feared heroin, saying, "It's a league of its own," but would lock himself in his room and use it anyway.

Heroin brings on a momentary bliss, the illusion of floating among the clouds. But when it wears off,

it's like waking from a nightmare. You can't help but crave another hit. You don't care whose money it is; you have to buy more.

When an addict comes down from the high, they turn to stimulants to bounce back. If a stable mental state is zero and anxiety, despair and fear are a negative ten, then post-heroin depression is a negative one hundred. It's absolute misery.

That's where stimulants come in.

Heroin's negative one hundred, stimulants' plus one hundred—a difference of 200 points. Throw in life's normal ups and downs and you find someone that's clinging to sanity for dear life.

In his final years, Aoyama Masaaki lived off heroin and stimulants. He should have been living a peaceful life.

Destruction was fast-approaching.

The Face of Death

June 27, 2001.

It was a cool, rainy afternoon.

Aoyama was holed up in his room.

As usual, he made some Akai Kitsune, his favorite since high school.

A few hours passed.

His mother called for him. He didn't respond.

There she found her son, hanging from a rope tied in the closet. He was already gone.

He had instant udon shortly before his death, so I don't think he truly wanted to die.

Everyone was shocked. News of the genius editor and writer's suicide spread like wildfire across the internet.

The July 18, 2001 issue of *FOCUS* featured Aoyama's death in detail.

The Charismatic 'Drug Writer' who Committed Suicide: "Many may wonder why the death of an unknown writer has blown upl online. But his masterpiece, *Dangerous Drugs* (Data House), published in 1992, is a best-seller that will soon reach over 100,000 sales. He enjoyed a cult following as a writer on all things drug-related, and it is said that nearly thirty media outlets rushed to cover the story after hearing of his suicide."

Aoyama's suicide strikes me as being similar to the suicides of those laid off as a result of the economy collapsing.

The bubble era was reaching a critical low. How will young people, who didn't have a chance from the start, make it out alive? Will only the young survive? A generation that once thrived is now struggling. Which will it be?

A mama's boy to the end, Aoyama died in his parents' home.

Comparing the suicides of Saki, Nekojiru and Aoyama, I found Aoyama's to be the most unexpected.

Though we'd grown apart, I would still get an oddly upbeat call from Aoyama about once a month.

Aoyama didn't seem to long for death. I thought of him as someone that couldn't die.

Neither Saki nor Nekojiru were afraid of death, though they were consumed with suicidal thoughts.

Nekojiru's wake was the first time I ever saw a dead body.

"Huh? Is this what it's like?" I wondered as I touched her cheek.

Her expression was so calm and peaceful. It was strange.

At Aoyama's funeral, I saw the cold corpse in his coffin. I touched his face too. His expression was completely different from Nekojiru's. It was contorted in pain, like something out of a horror movie. His complexion was sallow, discolored from years of using and abusing drugs. He looked unhealthy.

Depression was deeply intertwined with the suicides of all three, but while Saki and Nekojiru's deaths were "asked for," so to speak, I didn't get that impression from Aoyama's. He didn't want to die, but he forced himself to.

While Saki and Nekojiru's sleeping faces were peaceful, Aoyama's was distorted with fear, reminiscent of Munch's *The Scream*.

Aoyama was a man that was overly concerned with his health. Even when drinking canned Japanese tea, he'd take the trouble to transfer it to another container because "prolonged exposure to air would oxidize the can and become toxic to the body." So how was he okay with ruining himself with so many chemicals? This is mere speculation, but based on the look on his face, I'd say Aoyama was afraid to die after all.

I think Aoyama was somebody that was so sad that he wished he was dead, but couldn't bring himself to end it all. I can't help but feel this way, like he was driven to suicide by some third party.

There are different types of suicide. There are those who truly want to die and make the decision to do so, and those who truly want to live but don't see any other way forward. The motive is different.

Nekojiru and Isaki fall into the former category, but I can't help but feel that Aoyama falls into the latter.

I asked his ex-wives about my speculation on the cause of his death.

Overall, I think the "worry factory" Aoyama found himself on a sinking ship. Bouncing between stimulants and heroin, the stress of buying drugs and the debt he bought them with became unbearable. That's what I think.

Chapter 4: My Wife, Saki II

Days of Depression and Drugs

Three years after I started living with Saki, I suddenly became depressed.

I didn't know the cause. I suspected that no longer living a carefree life alone was causing me stress.

But I couldn't imagine life without Saki. We loved each other, so living together couldn't be the cause.

When I was depressed, I lost all motivation and spent my days lounging around or rereading manga (especially by Kajiwara Ikki, Morohoshi Daijiro and Saibara Rieko). And by rereading, I literally mean rereading the same manga over and over again, passing the time by surrendering to the predictable lull.

Saki, stressed by office politics, quit Company A and became a freelancer.

She only worked there because she forced herself to. But she couldn't bring herself to quit. Her emotional stability weakened by the day, and she became too painful to witness. I persuaded her to quit. She didn't seem to regret it, saying, "It was about time."

Perhaps feeling a sense of relief, she became lazy for a while. Since I was lazy due to my depression, we enjoyed a lazy life together for a while.

We lived off my savings from the publishing bubble.

We had a little under twenty million yen, so we took it easy.

For the next few years, we lived lazily with nothing to show for it.

Cannabis, LSD, ecstasy.

I'm a lightweight, but I strangely have an affinity for drugs and I always had plenty of them around to kill time. I had the full set when I was single, but stopped using "powders" (stimulants, cocaine, heroin) after I got married. I told Saki about my experiences with them.

The aftereffects of the bubble bursting were evident in the publishing industry, especially within the subculture genre. Books were selling poorly and the genre was nearly on the brink of extinction. Despite this, I was confident that I'd make it if I just worked hard.

Gradually, Saki began to feel anxious about money. She began taking on small jobs and working steadily. But she couldn't hold onto them for very long. Saki was a hardworking and methodical person at heart, so she worked diligently and meticulously. She also had excellent editing skills. But she couldn't accept the idea of merely working to make a living. She put her everything into her work, which inevitably caused stress to build up. Her physical and mental health declined, so she eventually quit.

My depression lingered, and after four years of living together, she sat me down.

"Just do something. Anything. It pains me to see you so unmotivated. You can do it!!"

I gradually began to feel that it was time for me to pull myself together.

I resumed working for a magazine. However, the publishing world was much different than before, with many jobs being high-effort and low-pay. It was only in my mid-thirties that I truly began to feel the instability of working freelance. It also made me realize that I'd been living in a bubble up until then.

Little by little I started being productive again. I published my first book in years, *Psychedelic & Trance*. It was the number one best-selling book at Tower Books in Shibuya during its first month of release, and the first edition sold ten thousand copies.

I guess if you put your mind to it, you can write a book that sells. Like Saki said, I'm right-brained. I could do anything if I really applied myself. I was finally starting to regain the confidence I had lost during my depression.

Marriage

Saki really appreciated my right-brained sensibilities.

"You're sharp in a way that any old genius isn't. Your eye for art, your ear for sound, your way with words. They're amazing."

Saki was a genius herself that showed no interest in other geniuses. So much so that she was

dismissive of people that boasted high academic scores.

Regarding people who prided themselves on their studies, she said, “It’s pathetic to try and feel good about something like that.”

She might’ve been speaking to her younger self.

She was very critical of others. Of Aoyama Masaaki, she said, “His cowardice shows on his face. He’s a liar. I appreciate his writing, but I don’t like him.”

She was quite harsh.

However, she showed a strong interest in right-brains like myself and Nekojiru.

Growing up, my parents just didn’t understand my need for individuality. I rebelled against them because they wanted to force me into a mold. Saki eased my growing resentment of being misunderstood.

She really understood me so well. I had never felt so understood before in my life. Being understood is the same as being showered with love. Surely love is the culmination of mutual understanding. As a kid, my parents and teachers often told me I was crazy and too much. Looking back, I was the picture of ADHD.

“You may be intense, but you’re not weird. You’re honest and straightforward, and that’s what irritates people with common sense. No one understands your taste,” she’d say affirmingly.

Talking to Saki helped me gain confidence. I became conscious of things I wasn’t conscious of before. I was able to look at myself objectively. Isn’t that the greatest achievement between a man and woman living under the same roof?

I felt so relaxed around Saki. But that was also because she made a lot of effort to accommodate me.

We never legally registered to marry. There was no ulterior motive behind it; I was just lazy and Saki said she didn’t care. Even her father thought it’d be best if we didn’t legally marry.

I had a great time on our first solo trip to Yakushima. Saki later told me that she found the trip nerve-wracking. Even in my relationship with her, she was suppressing her true self and forcing herself outside of her comfort zone a little too much.

She rarely expressed her feelings outright. She’d act like nothing was wrong while stress built up, then lash out at random. Saki was like a different person during those times, and it scared me.

“I can’t take this anymore!!!” she exclaimed, smashing the dishes.

“Please don’t bottle up your emotions anymore,” I begged. “I need you to tell me what you’re feeling.”

“You’re supposed to sense these things, I shouldn’t have to tell you. You’re bad at it. The older guys I’ve dated before always figured it out. You’re just immature.”

Seeing her faking it even in front of people she disliked made me anxious. I wondered if she was pushing herself to the point of neuroticism.

Longing for Euthanasia

I tried to return to the busy, hustling days of the bubble era.

But then Saki fell into a deep depression.

I can’t pinpoint why. It could’ve been anxiety about a lifestyle that was eating away at our savings,

or my own depression catching up with me.

While I somehow managed to get work, Saki's career was growing increasingly unstable.

The skin on her hands and feet grew rough from stress. But she had to work. So she did.

It seemed like she was anxious about the future. Saki wasn't used to being poor, even when she was unable to find work. She wasn't the optimistic type, either. And she worked hard at jobs she hated. The more she pushed herself, the worse her depression grew.

She was working as a freelance editor for a major publishing company's theater magazine. The work was a source of constant pressure for her. She called everything lame. She couldn't stand lame things. This is something she shared with Nekojiru: she was too proud for her own good. Being lame seemed like a thorn in her side.

She had a rough relationship with her boss.

"She's so stupid. She's inconsiderate. She's forgetful. And she's overly physical with me and invites me to women-only events. She treats me like a lesbian, like an equal, but we don't get along at all. I can't stand her!"

From what I can tell, her boss was certainly a bit insensitive, but Saki was also quite selfish.

She would often call me after work, slumped over at her desk without the energy to come home. I'd answer the phone and pick her up from the publishing company.

"I don't wanna take a train or a taxi."

I had no choice but to hold her hand and walk an hour back to the apartment in Asakusabashi. Saki was exhausted, so haggard that it was painful to witness. There was no strength in her hands. Her eyes were vacant. All from masking at work.

Her manic-depressive episodes ramped up, and she began talking about feeling hopeless. I wonder if my depression infected her.

I introduced Saki to a psychiatrist I met through work.

"Just go and see him," I said.

"Absolutely not."

I recommended some antidepressants and tranquilizers I had on hand, and she took them occasionally. But psychiatric medications work differently for different people, so I kept telling her to seek proper treatment. Finally, Saki started attending H Clinic. That was one month before she died.

I interviewed a doctor at H Clinic for a book on mental illness in *Bessatsu Takarajima*. After reading the interview, Saki decided that the doctor was the one for her.

It was around this time that Saki started constantly talking about her desire to be euthanized. From the very beginning of our relationship, she'd blurt out something like, "There's something ice cold inside of me. I wanna be euthanized,""I just want to die," and "I've already met everyone I want to meet and I've done everything I wanted to do. I'm ready." But I thought that was only half–true. When she was in a good mood, she seemed so happy and energetic.

Saki's suicidal thoughts were getting more and more intense. This was the beginning of a hellish era for Saki and I.

I'll Die

"The cord broke…"

Saki called me on my cell phone.

I had no idea what she was talking about. I thought she was making a joke.

But she was serious. She had tried to hang herself in the bathroom of the publishing company where she worked.

The cord broke and she lived.

I rushed to pick her up. Once again, I held Saki's hand and we walked home.

"I'm having suicidal thoughts." Saki said. "I want to die."

Saki often spoke of her desire for euthanasia, and this is how she explained it.

"Life is hard. I'm not afraid of death. I just can't stand the pain."

She'd started to believe that clinging to life was shameful.

"I'll die," she once said.

What exactly did life mean to Saki?

People must be afraid to die. That's why they work, play, love and laugh while keeping the thought of death at bay. I'm afraid of dying too.

There's still so much I want to do. I'm lazy when I'm depressed, sure, but I don't want to die.

Suicidal ideation—what a frightening term. The desire to commit suicide. It's believed that suicides among depressed patients arise from these suicidal thoughts.

No one starts at one hundred percent ideation. They send out SOS signals until the very end.

Saki's first attempt to hang herself in the publishing company bathroom failed, but somewhere in her heart she must have been hoping to be saved.

Wasn't it her determination to fight her depression that led her to H Clinic?

Anxious Warfare

Saki began seeing a psychiatrist.

She was prescribed Prozac.

It takes time to find the right medication, so going to a psychiatrist is better done sooner than later.

Looking back, Saki's visit to H Clinic came far too late.

She must've been suffering for so long. One night, I was awoken by a loud bang. I opened the bedroom door and found Saki tying a towel to the doorknob, preparing to hang herself.

I swiftly removed the towel from around her neck and checked her condition.

She was fine. She was alive. There was bruising on her neck, but…

"What are you doing?!"

Saki replied, emotionlessly, "I messed up. Sorry. Did I wake you?"

Her expressionless face was that of someone yearning for death. She might really go through with it. I was terrified. The fact that I was the only one who saw this side of Saki only added to the mounting pressure.

I once considered having Saki's parents come over while I lived peacefully back at my parents' house.

Our parents were in favor of Saki and I breaking up, so when they heard what I had to say, they immediately tried bringing her home.

"I'm never leaving here. I'll start over again," she said resolutely.

In the end, they left.

If she returned to her parents' house, she'd have to mask there. She just couldn't in her current state. Saki didn't want anyone else seeing her depressed. She was incredibly prideful.

At any moment, Saki might become overcome with suicidal urges and resort to killing herself. I couldn't take my eyes off her. It was a battle of nerves.

A month before she died, Saki quit her job at the theater magazine. At that point, she felt temporary relief. She really hated that job.

I hoped that'd help her feel better. But still, I remained on guard. I tried to stay awake as much as possible, and made sure to go to bed only after Saki had fallen asleep.

The slightest sound from the room, the bathroom, or the kitchen would startle me. I'd jump straight into action. The sound of a chair being moved, the sound of coffee being made, a book being

dropped, a door being slammed… all of them sounded ominous.

I was on high alert, determined to protect my wife at all costs. I had to be ready to pounce on her at a moment's notice. Even when I went to sleep at the end of the day, I was constantly vigilant, unable to fall into a deep sleep in case Saki sneaked out to try something. But then came a day where the opportunity presented itself.

Last-Minute Shopping

September 27, 2003.

That day, Saki was at her lowest.

I didn't know when she'd resort to the worst possible measures. Every second was chock full of tension. If I took my eyes off her, Saki might suddenly take serious action and end things between us for good. I couldn't let her out of my sight for even a moment.

We went for a walk in hopes of boosting our mood. I forced her to.

We often went for walks around the neighborhood to get some exercise. Saki was always keen to pet the cats, both domestic and stray. She would get so happy and excited.

"The cats at the oden shop are brothers, and the younger one lets me pet him more," she'd say.

But today she was quiet, walking slowly with her head bowed.

The people walking down the street seemed unconcerned about our plight.

As we passed through the shopping district, Saki asked me to wait for her outside a clothing store.

It'd been a while since she'd taken such initiative, so I did. I wondered what was going on.

After a little while, she came out of the store and handed me an item, saying, "Here you go." They were men's socks. Come to think of it, the ones I'd been wearing at the time were really worn-out…

Saki, in a state of depression so severe that it was almost impossible for her to speak, bought these for me.

She spent what little money she had in her nearly-empty wallet.

It was her last purchase. From a caring wife who loved her husband. To me, it was a parting gift.

We returned from our walk. I needed to break the silence, so I asked, "Can you remember any fun you've had up until now?"

"...No."

"What about, you know, any particularly good memories?"

"...Hmm…yeah, maybe the Juno Reactor concert and Disneyland."

There must've been more. There must have been so much more in our lives, Saki.

I wanted her to remember. I wanted her to feel the joy of living again.

Still, I was happy that she was able to remember even just two things in her depressed state.

A year ago in the summer, at Village Vanguard in Odaiba, our two books, *Psychedelic & Trance* and *2−:+/ Drug Special* were stacked side by side. Saki smiled and said, "We're matching!" She looked so happy. I wanted to see her smile again.

That's right. We had fun at Yakushima. You were looking at me with that beautiful smile. Please don't die, Saki. We still had a long way to go. Surrounded by macaques at Yakushima, you clung to me for dear life. Dying is ten times scarier than any monkey. So Saki… I may have been a good-for-nothing husband in many ways… but I wanted to protect you.

Anxious Warfare 2

Saki stayed up all night on her computer, showing no signs of going to bed.

As the tension grew, she became less and less willing to fall asleep.

It was a dangerous night.

At any moment, she might make a move while I wasn't looking.

"Ah, it's here…" Saki muttered.

What on earth could have happened?

Saki smiled wryly. Her period had finally arrived after a year of not having come.

They say that when depression is at its worst, a person doesn't even have the energy to commit suicide. The most dangerous window is when one is beginning to recover their energy but remains depressed.

Perhaps the onset of menstruation brought with it a subtle surge of vitality that was previously absent, the final push she needed. I can connect the dots now, but for whatever reason, I didn't that night.

The night wore on. Before I could even sleep, morning had come.

I still couldn't take my eyes off of Saki. The sunlight grew brighter as birds chirped outside. The newspaper delivery man came and went. The vibrant sounds of people beginning their day filled the air.

I gently embraced Saki, who was still alive at this point. She stared at me with vacant eyes.

"I'm sorry… I'm just depressed…" she said as I held her. "I'm gonna take a bath and go to bed."

Relieved, I dozed off in the living room. I'd been so on guard that I hadn't slept a wink.

I'd stayed up all night with Saki, so I was exhausted. I closed my eyes for maybe ten minutes.

I would forever regret that brief moment of rest.

I awoke with a start.

Huh? Where's Saki?

She was still in the bathroom. I became worried.

Could it be…?

I ran to the bathroom. I grabbed the doorknob and pushed, but it wouldn't budge. The door was heavy, as if rejecting me. I tried to push it harder, but something was blocking it. I charged at the door and slammed into it. Once, twice, three times. Finally, the door nudged open. Oh my God…

Saki had tied a rope to the doorknob and hanged herself. Her body lay limp and lifeless on the floor.

“No…!”

She looked calm, as if she had completely resigned herself from life. She looked like she was asleep. She still had some warmth in her. Her complexion was fine. Maybe she was just unconscious.

“Saki!”

I needed an ambulance! Saki was rushed to the hospital. I was in a state of panic, having no idea what was about to unfold.

Sirens.

Doctors in white coats.

The city in the early morning.

The peaceful chirping of sparrows.

Sounds swirled around in my head, disconnecting me from reality.

Saki.

She’s probably still alive.

Saki.

You’re kidding. This is some sick joke.

Saki.

Once I’d danced wildly at a rave, passed out, and was carted away via ambulance. Another time I’d overdosed and the same thing happened. I’ve rode in an ambulance four times in total. But I’d never had such a painful ride before. It was far worse than when I was the one on the stretcher.

Saki was already dead. She had a calm expression in her final moments. I kept looking at her face as I waited for the autopsy at the emergency hospital. Her death had become certain. It became reality.

Her pale face slowly grew blue. It was cool to the touch. But still, I couldn’t believe it. Saki was dead. She was gone.

I burst into tears. I cried like a baby, openly sobbing in front of everyone.

No matter how much I cried, my tears never stopped.

In the end, I couldn't save Saki.

Surrounded by Enemies

I fell into a kind of manic state during the days leading up to the funeral.

I regretfully fulfilled my duties.

I contacted everyone I could think of—my family, friends, coworkers.

I also contacted Akada, the person in charge of the hardcover edition of this book.

Five days earlier, I had a meeting at Asuka Shinsha to discuss the publication of a visual kei magazine.

I was planning to go to Toyama to do some research and report back.

“My wife has been emotionally unstable lately, so I’ve been keeping an eye on her,” I once said.

Akada remembered and was worried about her. In fact, I was wondering whether I should have my wife accompany me to Toyama for the interview.

I left a voicemail on Akada’s cell phone.

“There’s been an emergency, so I’ll have to postpone tomorrow’s meeting.”

Suppressing my distraught emotions, I added as calmly as possible, “Saki has committed suicide… she hanged herself.”

The autopsy was performed at the emergency hospital.

Her body gradually grew cold.

All I could do was cling to my wife’s body and sob. She only grew colder.

If my overflowing tears can warm you again, then I’ll continue to cry.

It pushed me to the brink of despair, making me wonder if a human could really grow that cold. Saki! You’re dying!

There’s still so much I want to do with you.

It’s so selfish of you to leave me alone.

What on earth should I do?

I couldn’t believe my own tears.

“Saki-chan!”

I heard a scream from behind me.

“Saki-chan!”

It was her parents.

Saki's father was extremely emotional, hurling abuse at me before I even saw Saki's body.

"What are you doing?! It's all your fault! Saki couldn't have been a lunatic like you. You killed her! You killed our daughter!"

"Give Saki back!" her parents howled.

No matter how cunning one may be, their weaknesses spill out during a panic.

Saki's younger brother rushed to the scene. We usually got along well, but today was different. He was ice cold.

Wails echoed throughout the room.

As I sobbed, Saki's younger brother muttered, "He who cries first wins, huh?"

Even Saki's brother turned on me.

With Saki gone, I was surrounded by enemies on all sides. I was cut off from Saki's family and my own, and Saki, the only person I had, was torn away by the cold hand of death.

As I broke down in the emergency room, my parents spoke to me.

"You're an adult, so you have to deal with this on your own. We won't help you or keep in contact with you. We don't want any trouble."

Their words could only be interpreted as a declaration of estrangement.

But none of that mattered to me at the time. All I could think was that Saki was dead and she wasn't coming back. The overwhelming loss disrupted my autonomic nervous system, leaving me in a constant state of hypertension.

It felt like I was the only person left on this earth.

Books to Die For

Our castle collapsed.

Saki's parents and relatives descended on our apartment.

"Don't attend the funeral. We won't tell you where her grave is."

“Give back all of my daughter’s belongings!”

They sorted through Saki’s things as if I weren’t even there. They combed through her vast collection of clothing and books.

I remember the books Saki loved.

Ever since middle school, Saki said there was a glacier in her heart. It was begging to be put out of its misery.

“That coldness will never disappear, no matter what.”

I think her stubborn desire for death might have been influenced by the books she read in her youth.

Saki had an incredible collection. She couldn’t bring everything from home into our apartment, so her room at her parents’ house became her personal library.

Saki once slit her wrists once in the past.

Her parents and brother were completely bewildered, so I suggested they take up some of the books in Saki’s collection.

“They’re too difficult to read…” her relatives complained.

But they wouldn’t know unless they saw it for themselves. Saki only read literature about dying.

The only slightly positive books in her collection were *Elmer’s Adventure*, *The Man Who Fought the Bear*, and *Animal Doctor*. Children’s books and manga.

Saki was trying to change. But each time she visited her parents’ house, she was lured in by those deathly texts. So Saki picked them out and brought them to our apartment.

“I’ll get rid of them one day,” she promised.

She’d kill time reading *Slam Dunk*. She loved it. She was obsessed with the character Mitsui. I bought her the deluxe edition and she always read it before bed.

Saki was a fan of yaoi and read *Slam Dunk* through a fujoshi’s lens. She loved yaoi so much that she’d visit Ariake Comic Market just to buy doujinshi.

The Wake

The family asked me to hand over the computer I shared with Saki. It housed so many memories.

Saki's father had acted as the guarantor for our apartment. He canceled our lease and asked me to move out ASAP.

Her parents took everything. All that was left were the cold, barren walls. I was alone in the room where Saki and I shared it all. I was crushed by loneliness during the nights.

But there was still something I had to do.

I had to gather our friends for the wake.

It was Wednesday, October 22nd, at 7:00 p.m.

Eight of my closest friends attended.

Akada was the first to arrive. He brought canned beer and snacks.

Rain began to fall.

Saki's room was completely sparse. It was bleak, really. Only a CD player, speakers, and trance CDs remained. I suddenly remembered Saki and I's ecstasy when we danced. She bounded around innocently, exuding a cute, girlish charm. She seemed genuinely happy. Tears welled up in my eyes.

Ah, that's right. I still have our bed…

I'd no longer be living in our apartment, so I'd have to say my goodbyes.

I turned to Akada. "Can you help me move it out?"

"Sure."

We disassembled it together and took the elevator down to the dumpster on the first floor.

Our breath billowed out in the cold rain.

I'm still alive. I still can't believe Saki is dead.

Perhaps some post-funeral mania was kicking in. Despite my desperate grief, I felt the need to do what needed to be done. I was working efficiently, just as I had during the publishing boom.

The intercom was ringing by the time we got back, and friends started to trickle in. Saki and I weren't religious, but we created a makeshift altar on a chair and decorated it with photos of her.

I couldn't bear the silence, so I played the soundtrack to *Pulp Fiction*.

Yamada from Tokyo Koshi also came over. He brought a bottle of preservative-free wine, which even I could enjoy as someone who doesn't drink.

Yamano Hajime was in attendance as well.

“Want some oolong tea? We brought some wine and canned beer,” he said as he unpacked his bag of drinks.

Seino Eiichi came over with his girlfriend and comforted me, saying, “If there’s anything you need, just let me know.”

Milky Isobe (Saki’s former boss at the publishing company she worked for), a female colleague, and Nicholas Keiji rolled in as well. We talked about Saki until the early hours of the morning.

Thanks to them, I was able to escape my loneliness, if only for a little while.

But the inevitable was already approaching.

I had to move out of the apartment as soon as possible. Since I didn’t have any relatives willing to act as a guarantor, it was difficult to find a place to rent.

Finally, through a mutual friend, I managed to rent out a “guest house” for foreigners in Chofu. The rent was 46,000 yen. No gas or water. Shared bathroom. It was a far cry from the swanky apartment I shared with Saki.

“Won’t your parents act as guarantors?” Akada asked.

I had no choice but to tell him the truth.

“We’re estranged, I guess. I haven’t seen them in ages.”

My relationship with my father was terrible, and remains so to this day.

With the help of a friend, a chunk of my manga collection was sold off to a Mandarake in Akihabara. They gave me a fair price, and that helped me supplement my living expenses for the time being.

Nearly one thousand of my favorite records (mostly techno, trance and deep cuts) were graciously stored at a friend’s place in the countryside. I significantly reduced my belongings. I threw away five of my six bookshelves. I only kept a few items that reminded me of Saki.

Saki’s parents held my mistakes over my head and blamed me for their daughter’s death. They doted on her so much, and they were devastated to have lost her.

I hadn’t told them much about Saki’s suicide attempts and her depression, so they were shocked by her sudden death. But given Saki’s personality, they should have been able to guess as much. They must have known that deep down, she was selfish. Still, they seemed to want to believe that I killed her, not that she killed herself.

They say love is blind, but their love was reserved only for blood relatives. To them, I was

unworthy.

And so, Saki's body and I were forever separated…

No Money

October 27th. Five days after the wake.

I received a call from Akada.

"I have a proposition for you. Why don't you put your visual mook on hold and write about the incident? Think about it. Your wife, Nekojiru and Aoyama. All three were close to you, and they all committed suicide in the same way. I think your work would be meaningful, for those left behind and for those considering suicide."

I was taken aback by such a request.

I didn't even know if I still had the energy to write it all down.

But I'd been obsessing over Saki's death and I needed to move on. Otherwise, I'd fall apart.

"I understand."

I accepted Akada's request. But I still had some concerns.

"It's a fine plan, but I dunno if I have the energy… I'll do it. I have to write. I'll write down all my memories of Saki. I've been too dependent on her. Ever since she died, I've… I've lost my focus. I don't know what to do…"

Tears rolled down my cheeks. Akada expressed worry for me. Suddenly, I realized I hadn't had anything but water for three days. My reflection was ghastly.

I had no money. I could only earn 50,000 yen by submitting proposals to TV stations and paying my rent with the novel I'd serialized in *BURST HIGH*. When the police asked me to cough up a 300,000 yen autopsy fee, I was broke and struggled to control my anger. I had lost everything—my savings, which until a few years prior had amounted to around twenty million yen, my home and my wife. All that was left was a loneliness so intense it made me quake.

The foreign housing complex I lived in was a forty-minute walk from the nearest station. There were a few Japanese people living there, including myself.

I just couldn't get used to it. I didn't want to stay holed up in my room, so I'd go to the head shop and bar in Okachimachi and drink copious amounts of coffee. Up to ten cups a day.

I'd cut ties with drugs purely because of my finances. Caffeine and nicotine were my only options. I drank coffee and smoked in silence. This was how I killed time.

Meanwhile, Saki's parents were blowing up my cell phone.

"You killed her! Give Saki back!"

"You're trying to gain sympathy by lying about being estranged from your parents, but you aren't fooling me."

"This is your fault. We're the victims here."

"You should've taken care of her!"

…No matter how hard I objected, they were so wrapped up in their delusions that conversations

never panned out. One thing was clear: they firmly believed that they were completely innocent. Maybe that's why they felt compelled to blame someone else.

Those calls plunged me further into depression. Over and over again.

My libido was shot.

I had no desire for sex. I stopped masturbating. I had no appetite.

I'd go to the 105 yen section of BOOK OFF to buy magazines like *NEWTON* and *WIRED*. I'd cut out pictures I liked and make collages to soothe my pain. That was the only thing that comforted me.

I used to buy and listen to CDs a lot, but now I had no money, so I could only afford the ones in the sale section.

I started having auditory hallucinations. I made an appointment with a psychiatrist I became friends with during a magazine interview and asked him to up my dosage of tranquilizers and antidepressants.

Looking back, Saki was always thinking about others because she was so concerned about the time, place and occasion.

She was always trying to accommodate others. In reality, she had a very strong sense of what she liked and disliked. When she disliked someone, it caused her to feel conflicted.

But she never revealed that to others. She was always acting like a good girl.

Acting came natural to her. No wonder she got so tired of playing a role.

She'd let off steam at home, sure, but in the end I could tell she was always trying so hard to accommodate me.

There were times when I found myself wondering what Saki was really like—when she was furious and when she was elated.

Saki's father would harshly berate me.

"Everything out of your mouth is an excuse. You ruined her life and then you killed her!"

He wanted to blame me for her suicide. He didn't seem to think for a moment that the problem could have stemmed from within the family. He wanted someone, something to blame other than himself. But Saki's mental decline first festered at home. It started when she was in school.

Saki's father, who showed no remorse whatsoever, could be described as someone solely looking

out for himself.

Deep down he was a good, earnest and simple man. But he was hopelessly narrow-minded. He panicked, not wanting to accept his daughter's death. He chose instead to blame it all on me.

That aura of hatred was oppressive.

"I want to die, too."

That's what I thought for a moment. But my death wouldn't solve a thing. Saki wouldn't come back. Nobody would be happy.

But it was so painful. I felt like I was going crazy. I wanted to run away from it all!

Just like Saki, everyone left behind would want to know why. But it's not that simple. It's merely speculation of the bereaved.

I'm at fault in many ways. I regret letting my depression get so bad. The fact that my depression led to a sexless marriage made Saki sad. I overdosed on Ritalin (which is now illegal), got high, and masturbated for the first time in a while, a habit I'd had since my single days. Saki found out I was masturbating without her and she got mad at me.

The economy was rough, so maybe it was a mistake to let her take a job she didn't want. Saki's parents say that was her reason. Her irregular periods, which had been coming after a while of absence, may also have pushed her to do it.

I think age played a part, too. Saki and Nekojiru held the same resolution: "I will never grow old. I would rather die than become an old lady." They both looked so young. They could've passed for students. But Saki was thirty-five, too old to be considered a girl.

So the question remains: did they choose death in favor of aging?

I once showed an abridged version of this manuscript to a female editor at a publishing company.

"I didn't know Saki," she said. "But as someone who never met her, I can't bring myself to like the Saki portrayed in this manuscript. She's totally dependent on her father, dancing through the publishing boom, and when life gets too difficult, she dies. Frankly, I can't sympathize with her."

Objectively speaking, Saki was very selfish.

But even if she was, my love for her remains the same. No matter how selfish she was, to me she was my beloved "Saki-chan." That editor simply didn't have eyes to see.

Reasons to Commit

“I’ll die.”

She died just as she said she would.

She looked so at peace. If she committed suicide, it’s because she wanted to.

But are there really people that just “die”?

Those left behind try to justify the suicide victims' s choice with conjecture. Sometimes this leads to overly self-centered conclusions. And I' m the same way. I can' t help but wonder.

What on earth drove Saki to her death?

A job she didn' t want. Her fading youth. A sexless marriage. A husband who didn' t work. Putting on a mask in front of everyone. An unusually high level of pride. Selfishness. Depression. All of these factors wove together to give Saki a death wish. To nudge her off the edge.

What on earth should I have done? I should have done this. No, that was wrong. I agonized over this and that, trying to highlight my own shortcomings. The more I thought about them, the more came to mind, and there was no end in sight. My thoughts looped endlessly. The hell of my own depression began anew.

My friend (Nekojiru) died, and my former colleague (Aoyama Masaaki) died. Both came as a huge shock.

But they pale in comparison to losing Saki. My wife of six years and my greatest supporter. I was devastated beyond repair. It opened my eyes. I hadn' t realized the extent of grief experienced by Nekojiru' s husband and Aoyama' s ex-wives. After all, it was "someone else' s problem."

It' d be disrespectful to kill myself. So many people die even if they don' t want to. But when Saki committed suicide, I didn' t feel disrespected. It was her right. I tried to accept Saki' s choice, even if it was the worst possible decision, thinking that it was the only logical conclusion to reach. I think Saki had thought things through very deeply, to the point where it was pure impulse. Since her second year of junior high school, she' d wanted to be euthanized. She wanted a quick and painless death. But dying is painful. Isn' t there a way to die without suffering? I haven' t found out yet, so I continue to live.

Let's Go to Saki's Place

It had been almost three months since Saki died, but to me it only felt like two or three days had passed. In reality, I was busy packing my belongings, moving, and visiting friends, but I didn' t process the passage of those three months.

I was so stressed I couldn' t sleep, eat, or make any progress on my manuscript. I focused on packing up my things and moving.

Looking back, I was a little manic at the time. The mania subsided after a month and I fell into a severe depression. The mental breakdown of grief was unbearable. My autonomic nervous system was in disarray. I was constantly tense. Whenever I felt unstable, I'd seek refuge at a friend's house. I was especially grateful to Nekojiru's husband, Yamano Hajime. When I couldn't adjust to my new place and fell into a panic, he'd pick me up and take me to his house.

Finally sick of it all, I found myself on the roof of an apartment building.

Loneliness was inching me forward.

Let's go to Saki's place. Nekojiru and Aoyama will be there, too.

A dull light shone on the rooftop through the overcast sky.

If I could just get over that wire mesh, everything would be over. It would be easier.

I staggered to the mesh and put my hand on it. I hiked my heel up and tried to climb forward.

The people and cars were tiny beneath me. The sounds of everyday life echoed in the back of my mind.

I'll jump. I'll finally be rid of this pain. Forever.

I've made up my mind. I'll see you soon, Saki.

I put my hand in hers and prepared to throw myself into the void.

And at that moment…

A collage of faces came to mind.

They flowed endlessly, like a fountain.

Friends. Coworkers. Old acquaintances. People I'd met just the other day.

Come to think of it, I was short on cash and had borrowed some money from my friends.

What would they say if I died without permission?

"Yoshinaga, live on."

"No matter how hard it is, live on."

I remembered the warm, yet tense words of encouragement from my friends who rushed to my side

after Saki passed away.

They all told me that I'm not alone. Even though I'm shunned by both families. I'm not alone.

Akada had repeatedly asked me to write something new. What was I doing while he was trying so hard to be a good editor?

Just as I was about to throw myself away, an invisible lifeline caught me. "I can't die yet." That's what I thought.

That's when I realized. I had been totally dependent on Saki. Saki was my lover, my teacher, my mother. She was my lifeline. But that line has snapped. I'm working on this manuscript in a very unstable state.

But I can't die yet. My friends and my debts are my new lifelines.

Some of my friends said it's too early to write about Saki. But now that she's etched so deeply into my heart, I want to write about her.

When I read this back later, I'll probably think that I'm being irrational. But I think that's okay.

My life changed completely when Saki died. I faced the biggest crisis of my life. I had to start from scratch.

Chapter 5: About Myself

Raised by Marxism

Let me tell you a little about myself.

Yoshinaga Yoshiaki is my pen name.

When I worked with Aoyama on *Bessatsu Takarajima*, there was an author introduction page at the end of the issue.

Aoyama's name is first because it starts with A, so he stands out. So I decided to stand out too with a name starting in Y. I took my first name from Fujiwara Yoshiaki, my favorite wrestler.

I just changed some of the characters around.

And that's how I decided on Yoshinaga Yoshiaki.

I was born in Tokyo. I have a brother that's six years older than me.

My father graduated from Chuo University and worked for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government as a civil servant.

My father was a Marxist, and his older brother served as chairman of the Japan–Cuba Friendship Association. I remember his photo with Castro appearing in the *Asahi Shimbun* one year. He was a professor in the Faculty of Economics at Chuo University, where he taught Marxist economics. My grandfather died in the war, and my father was raised by his older brother.

My father was deeply influenced by the Marxism of his older brother, to whom I owe a lot.

Marxists advocate for overthrowing established power, smashing feudalism, and revolution, but ironically, my father was no better than a dictator at home. He complained a lot, but never did anything to change. He was the type to subscribe to the Japanese Communist Party's newsletter but never take action.

I never received an allowance. Our frugal lifestyle was inspired by Marx, but I hated it.

We had a TV at home, but we were forbidden from watching it. "TV will make you stupid," he said. I couldn't talk about *Ultraman* or anime with my classmates. Music was my only salvation. It was my drug of choice.

I was stuck listening to the records we had at home. My father and older brother were classical music fanatics, and their passion rubbed off on me. We had a good sound system. I didn't listen to classical music because I wanted to, but rather because it was all we had in the house. As I listened, I grew fond of Baroque: Bach and early music in general.

When you think of classical music, you tend to think of it as a hobby for the cultured. But I didn't listen to it with that in mind. I listened purely for pleasure. Bach is ecstasy. It's the privilege of being able to let the sound capture your undivided attention, and in that respect, Bach's music is beautiful.

My father was Beethoven, my older brother was Schoenberg, and I was Bach. I would darken the

room, sit in front of the speakers, and listen to pieces like “Partitas” from start to finish. As a kid, I did it sober. That changed as I became an adult and drugs came into the mix.

While other kids were singing along to Finger 5 and Downtown Boogie Woogie Band, I was listening intently to Bach. I must have been quite the oddball.

About my Family

My earliest memories are of the daily fistfights I had in kindergarten. Despite my docile appearance, I fought for dominance on the jungle gym.

In elementary school, I became a bookworm and spent all my time hanging out at the library. Since I couldn’t watch TV, books were my only source of entertainment.

I devoured every collection of world classics and children's literature I could find. Hino City's library was well-stocked and somewhere I could read in peace, so I borrowed as many books as possible and read the rest in the library.

I read the most in my early elementary school years, an average of two books a day. Nearly sixty books a month.

I was an extreme example. Once I got into university, I fell in love with movies and watched roughly four hundred a year. I'd watch them and do drugs until I was on the verge of death.

We subscribed to the *Asahi*, *Mainichi*, *Sankei* and *Akahata newspapers*. My father made me read them all, too. He wanted me to keep up with what was happening in national politics. The one newspaper he didn't subscribe to was *Yomiuri*. He was anti-Yomiuri.

The only magazines I was allowed to buy were the *Asahi Journal*, *Gendai no Me*, *Sekai*, and *Mass Media Criticism* (later published as *Uwasa no Shinso*), and whatever my older brother had in his room.

I hated my father's obsession with Marx. Perhaps I was influenced by him without realizing it. I absolutely hated popular things, such as the Giants, Taiho, and tamagoyaki, even as my anti-Marxism grew.

My nerdy, genius older brother was under my father's control. He studied abroad in the Soviet Union for a short period on a scholarship.

When I was in high school, I was pressured to study abroad in Cuba. I desperately resisted, refusing to let myself spend my precious youth there. Back then, the only image I had of Cuba was of sugarcane. I knew nothing of drugs.

My only experience was with nicotine in my first year of high school. Speaking of which, I smoked some weed as a college student in New York. It was incredibly exhilarating. I was at someone's apartment in Brooklyn, smoking, and before I knew it, I'd crossed the Brooklyn Bridge and ended up in Chinatown. I'd walked quite the distance.

Anyhow, my father's Marxism had a strong influence on his work in the civil service, and union activity was thriving. Perhaps because of this, my older brother dashed his dreams of working in media to become a private school teacher.

My brother is still single. A normal family would think of arranged marriage, but in a Marxist family, that tradition is considered feudal and strictly forbidden.

He's never tried drugs. Never even heard of marijuana. He doesn't even know who I am.

I think he's a virgin, too. That's how sheltered he is.

He has a bachelor pad, but it's as if there's this aura that wards away women. He's not ugly by any means. Just silly.

Even when Saki died, he didn't seem to understand how I felt.

When I ID'd her body and contacted my brother, all he had to say was, "Oh. Is that so."

Maybe. I was a mess at the time, so I don't remember exactly what it was he said, but I think he added a "good luck" in there somewhere.

My mother was like my father's appendage; she couldn't live independently, couldn't survive without him.

She truly wanted to support me, but she was too scared of my father to do so. She was raised to be naive and weak.

I'm pretty much estranged from my parents, and when Saki died, my father said something that was tantamount to cutting all ties with me. I'll never forget that sinking feeling in my chest when he said, "This is your problem. Leave us out of it."

I Want to Be Understood

I was fed up with the Spartan, Marxist homelife that ignored my individuality. The love they expressed felt conditional.

I ran away from home a few times, and each time I've been labeled "extreme" and "crazy."

As a boy, eating apples, kiwis, or cherries would cause hives to welt all over my body. I suffered from severe rhinitis during pollen season. I was allergic to everything.

My parents attributed all of my problems to a failure to thrive.

I even had an electroencephalogram test taken because I was so restless. Looking back, I realize now I had ADHD, but in the end, all of this was dismissed as nothing more than an example of my emotional instability. My parents were very sensitive about admitting I had anything wrong with me.

I have no memory of ever being emotionally dependent on my parents. Instead I was incensed by a desire to be understood.

Saki was the one that was able to grant me peace.

She understood my individuality and highly valued my right-brainedness. Thanks to Saki, I was on the verge of graduating from that desperate craving to be understood.

Being understood was the same as being loved. And then, Saki died.

I came so close to jumping off the roof of a building that I barely managed to stay tethered to the ground. Nobody would've been surprised if I had gone after Saki in that moment.

But my friends saved me.

Friends from as far as Tokyo, Hiroshima and Okazaki rushed to my side, even though I was a ball of nerves.

They mourned Saki and tried to ease my mind by talking to me, even though I was completely exhausted.

"Yoshinaga, you have to live!"

"If you give up now, I'll hate you forever!"

That's how they encouraged me.

They knew my relationship with Saki better than my parents or Saki's family did. And they were the first to worry about keeping me alive.

It was solely thanks to my friends that I was able to avoid losing faith in people and am somehow able to believe that I have to live. That I have to turn over a new leaf.

Among them, I was particularly touched by the advice and thoughtfulness of Yamano Hajime, who shared the same experience of losing his wife.

2DK Apartment For Rent, 170,000 Yen

“You need to leave,” Saki’s father demanded. “Immediately.”

I had no choice but to move out.

I frantically searched for a new apartment. As a freelancer without a family member to act as

guarantor, I had no choice.

At her parents' insistence, I returned most of Saki's belongings.

Books, CDs, office equipment, clothes…

Taking a step back, I realized Saki had quite the wardrobe.

Most of her belongings were things I'd bought myself or things she'd received from ex-boyfriends during the bubble era, before she started living with me.

"These books sure are strange…"

Saki's father muttered as he sorted through gay and lesbian literature.

I got rid of most of my books and sent many of my CDs to friends' houses. I also got rid of my desk, bookshelf, and bed.

Only the things Saki had bought for me and the things I'd gifted her remained.

Saki had left me the most thoughtful gifts, picking them out with discerning eyes that knew full well my love of audio-visuals. They were rather eccentric.

— — Mementos of Saki.

A professional-grade dodecahedron speaker called the Polygon. An illuminated statue of the Virgin Mary.. A thick foreign-language collection of electron microscope photographs, a copy of *HEAVEN AND EARTH*.

A watch with a psychedelic trance alarm. An MD Walkman. A one-of-a-kind kaleidoscope. Techno club-style clothes. Scooter's new album. A DVD of Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice*.

The room I'd once shared with Saki stood before me like a body bereft of soul.

I was flooded with memories of when we first moved in.

Saki was in a rush when she returned from the real estate agency.

"Hurry! Let's go see the apartment. It's on the ninth floor, has no neighbors on either side, and has a rooftop balcony!"

The property in Asakusabashi was newly built. Indeed, there were no neighboring rooms and it had a spacious balcony. It was a 2DK apartment for a staggering 170,000 yen. It was a luxury for us, but we decided on it. Saki was born to live in this apartment.

I couldn't be stingy. I had savings, so I knew we'd manage.

In our yet-to-be-furnished apartment, we played some music on our portable sound system. "Twisted" by Hallucinogen.

"We can make a lotta noise in here," Saki said, smiling and bouncing on her heels. We were brimming with hope.

Seven years have passed since then.

I moved out about a month after Saki's passing.

Emotional Instability

Now I live in a foreigner's lodge in Chofu with no guarantor, security deposit, or key money required. The rent is 46,000 yen and there's no gas or running water.

Without air conditioning, the heat of the 2003 summer was unbearable.

At one point, I lost contact with my editor, Akada, and he was so concerned that he paid me a visit.

I wasn't hungry and I couldn't eat. I became malnourished, nearing the brink of death.

After losing my wife, I ate through my savings. Feeling destitute and depressed, I returned to living alone for the first time in seven years.

I hadn't recovered from Saki's death, but I wanted to get used to my apartment and start over.

However…

I couldn't adjust to my new apartment and my emotions teetered towards instability.

I couldn't sit still, so I kept tapping my foot. I wanted to concentrate on something to distract myself, but even when I picked up a book or turned on some music, I couldn't do it. My anxiety ramped up, as if I was being chased. My whole body was tense.

I consulted a psychiatrist colleague and he suggested that I was already prone to manic depression, so the shock of my wife's suicide had probably triggered a manic episode in me. Apparently it's not uncommon for people to suddenly become manic during funerals.

I was officially accepted as a patient and was prescribed antipsychotics.

Around the time I started taking my prescribed antidepressants and anti-anxiety medication, the feeling of restlessness eased, and I instead felt sapped of all energy. It was as if the tense chord of my heart had snapped, and I became increasingly depressed.

One lonesome night, catastrophe struck.

I couldn't fit in my apartment. The tension was off the charts, my nerves on fire.

I've got a bad feeling about this…

My existence was diluting by the second.

Help me…

Someone! Anyone!

I'm trying so hard to live,but it seems like I… I shouldn't be alive?!

I'm going crazy!

I felt like screaming.

I was in a panic.

Sweat poured down my face.

My breathing was getting rough and all I could hear was pounding in my chest. My heart was going so fast I thought it would burst.

My head felt hollow, and I lost track of where I was.

I'm falling.

I'm falling.

What's become of me?!
I'm in pain.

Saki, help me.

Saki…

Saki!

I… I…

I was going crazy.

Friends

I called Nekojiru's husband.

It felt as if twilight came and went in the time I waited for the receiver to pick up.

I wonder if he's not home. Please, please answer. If this silence continues, I'm in trouble.

Hello? Hello?

I heard Yamano's voice.

I finally spoke. "I just can't calm down. This is so hard."

"You're pretty depressed, aren't you?" Yamano answered. "I've had times where I was unbearably restless. You don't have time to catch a train. I'll pick you up so just wait for me. I promise I'll be there soon."

Strangely enough, hearing Yamano's voice was enough to lift the weight off my shoulders.

He came to my rescue and took me to his house.

I was still as nervous as ever, but I felt reassured. Seeing that my autonomic nervous system was out of whack, along with my freezing body temp, he quickly drew a bath for me.

"Are you taking any medication?"

"Oh, yeah…"

"Are you feeling restless?"

"Yes, I am."

"Maybe you should focus on something. Shall we rent a video?"

We rented Eddie Murphy's *Coming to America*. Apparently it was Nekojiru's favorite comedy. It was well-made and entertaining, with no cynical undertones.

"I think something like this is good for when you're feeling down. *Brazil* would probably be a bit much for you right now."

He was absolutely right. By the end of the two-hour movie, I had regained my composure.

He let me stay the night. The next day, we randomly played frisbee. It was Yamano's suggestion. He saw how depressed I was and nursed me back to stability.

After that, whenever my emotions started to break down, I'd call him and he'd talk me through my episodes. He never let his emotions get the better of him and always responded calmly. Even when I was losing my mind, he'd say, "Oh, I heard that story yesterday too. It seems like you're repeating yourself a bit. Have you considered taking notes?"

He responded tactfully, without making me feel uncomfortable about my unstable emotions. His unfazed attitude toward my panic was very reassuring.

“Saki’s probably gone to the same place as Nekojiru. You were good friends. It’ll be okay. She’s watching from above and laughing at us commoners struggling to survive.”

I felt a sense of relief.

When Nekojiru passed away six years ago, I realized I hadn’t fully understood Yamano’s feelings.

I never understood how difficult it was to lose your other half until I lost Saki.

Yamano spoke as I tearfully reminisced about Saki.

“It’s been six months already, yet you remain so kind. To be honest, I would’ve cooled off by now, but maybe that’s Nekojiru talking. Yoshinaga is sentimental. Almost too sentimental.”

Sentimental is an understatement. I think he was trying to say, “Are you still down? Pull yourself together.”

Yamano is a brilliant left-brained genius. But living with right-brained Nekojiru had, in a way, molded him into a man that can better understand the emotions of us right-brainers. He’d take my jumbled emotions and make sense of them. He was like a translator. He experienced the grief of losing his wife to suicide, but still managed to recover. He was like a role model to me.

Saki once said that Yamano had told her, “Please take good care of Yoshinaga.” I think he was concerned about the inherent sensitivity that comes with being right-brained.

Saki’s death was traumatic, but nobody would feel better if I followed in her footsteps. On the contrary, my friends have told me they’d curse me if I even thought about taking my own life. I didn’t have the heart to do it. I had to repay my debt. Being despised by my friends was a fate worse than death.

After losing Saki, Yamano and my friends became my new lifeline.

A Journey to Visit Friends

A man who lost his wife to suicide doesn’t seem like he’d recover so easily.

Men can be such timid creatures.

I was so lonely that I couldn’t stand it.

Desperate for human contact, I set out on a journey to visit some friends living in the countryside.

My friends welcomed me warmly and offered to talk to me, even though I was a shell of my former self. I wasn't able to drink with them due to being on prescribed tranquilizers; alcohol made my mind and body feel sluggish. When I tried to nod my head and speak, my words slurred. The more I tried to speak properly, the more tongue-tied I became.

I'd experienced the intoxication of various drugs, including marijuana, since my twenties, but this was my first time getting "high" off of tranquilizers. It wasn't a pleasant feeling. I was rather frustrated that I couldn't speak the way I wanted to.

One memorable night, I was relaxing at the office of Hiroshima-based writer Marquis Kabachi (a pen name) with fellow writer Yasunori Goan, who worked with Aoyama Masaaki, among others.

Three of their friends had also joined us. We all loved music and listened to a wide variety of it.

"Yoshinaga-san, do you have anything to play?"

At Kabachi's urging, I handed over the CD I'd brought with me, Tokyo Ghetto Pussy. It was beautiful trance, sentimental and tear-jerking, featuring English female vocals.

"Take a listen to this," one man suggested, and played a sample CD of a song he'd written himself. It was gentle, sentimental pop featuring Japanese female vocals.

I never wanted to grow up

But as an adult

I realized I can't keep thinking this way

Don't close your eyes the moment something changes

Seeing me listening intently, the owner of the CD said, "Here, take it." He was gruff, but kind.

I loved this CD and often listened to it at my place in the foreign housing complex. Tears would well in my eyes as I listened.

In that moment, I felt true gratitude.

Why are they so kind to me? Because I was vulnerable. Because they were friends. Because they were my friends' friends.

Dependent on Work

My journey visiting friends in my weakened state was profoundly moving.

I returned to Tokyo exhausted.

The mania triggered by Saki's funeral had subsided, and I became depressed again. I tried to ease

the pain with sedatives and somehow managed to stay composed. But even with the sedatives, I only managed to feel slightly lower than neutral. And they gave me a little high.

“Doctor, this medication makes me loopy. It’s a bad look at work and I’m falling behind. Could you switch me to something more effective…?” I called my doctor for advice.

“It’s too early. What’s important now is relieving tension and stabilizing your mind. Your priority right now is being able to eat and sleep. This prescription will help your body before your mind.”

For about a month after Saki’s death, I barely slept, and when I did, I was essentially passing out. I had no appetite and lived off a liquid diet. All I drank was Weider Jelly and Pocari Sweat.

Sure, it was true that sleep gradually came naturally. I still had no appetite, but I’d quietly eat when I needed to. Perhaps my doctor’s strategy was correct. With that in mind, I continued taking my prescribed medication.

Some of my friends weren’t impressed.

“You look pathetic. You need to clear your mind, now!” a friend of mine said. She encouraged me by saying that when she was in a messy relationship with her boyfriend and unable to break up with him, she got through her depression by relying on stimulants to clear her mind. Drawing on that experience, she recommended the same to me.

Her advice, though blunt, was born out of pure consideration for my well-being. Reality is sometimes harsh like that. Everyone is struggling to survive, overcoming crises in their own way. Feelings like fun, happiness and excitement, become diluted. Sexual and material desires disappear, but the tranquilizers managed to keep me hydrated and away from spiraling back into depression.

Even when I sat at my desk, I found myself brooding over photos of Saki.

When I found myself in that state I realized the only thing I could do was write the manuscript for this book.

I couldn’t rely on friends forever. Above all, with the economic crisis looming over me, I had to get to work.

I set up the sound system in my room and arranged the books I needed for work, along with two cardboard boxes of CDs. I have a habit of constantly playing music no matter what I do, including while writing.

It was in that room that I began writing the manuscript for this book. It was all I could do. Financial and emotional circumstances forced me to depend on my work to survive.

I felt ashamed that I hadn’t realized this until I was pushed to that point.

For the first time in my life, I took out a loan.

I thought I'd become rusty if life continued on this way, so I decided to push through with my work, writing manuscripts even though I was depressed.

Since I'm not salaried, I work part-time at a convenience store during the week.

I work during the day and write at night. Little by little, I'm making a comeback. Little by little…

Loop

I wake up in the middle of the night to a sudden noise.

"Oh, Saki's home," I think to myself, in a haze of sleep.

"Welcome home!!"

As I sit up to greet her, I suddenly realize I'm not in our castle, but in the six-tatami room where I live alone.

I've experienced this many times before.

It's been more than six months since Saki died. To me it feels like it's only been a few days. I've lost all sense of time.

I remember Saki's body awaiting the autopsy as if it were just the other day. She was sleeping peacefully. I felt as if she'd respond if I called out to her.

"King, King~!"

I can hear Saki calling back to me. She sounds a little anxious.

Saki. I'm here. Don't worry. Don't worry… Everything's okay now.

Though I'm working out the kinks in this manuscript, I'm not writing coherently. I haven't been able to sort out my feelings at all, so I write for a bit, then stop to brood over photos of Saki.

She hated being photographed, so there isn't much left of her. Looking at photos brings back memories. One photo shows when we went to Osawayama Onsen in Niigata. It was winter, and Saki was standing on a mountain trail, wearing her coat and facing me. She looked adorable with the hood pulled over her head. I was exploring a narrow path of the mountain when a pickup truck and several dogs came barreling towards us. The dogs were off-leash. Saki immediately stiffened and flinched.

"We were attacked by wild dogs!"

In reality, the dogs were domesticated and out for a walk, but I can remember Saki's fear, clear as day. She was a cute, timid girl. Looking at the photo reminds me of that mundane scene of the usually strong-willed Saki— and the tears begin to flow, unstoppable, as they often do.

I coordinated Saki's clubbing outfits from head to toe and hung them on the wall.

I plastered her favorite Christian paintings on the wall, ordered by largest to smallest.

"Sadness is my drug."

"There are some things you learn only when you die. By the time you realize it, it's too late."

"There's no going back."

"I want to go to Amsterdam with Saki."

“I want to go to Yakushima again with Saki.”

“Saki, you’re safe. You’re safe.”

“God, please give Saki back to me.”

I scribbled everywhere.

I pasted work faxes and manuscript structure notes over my writings. I plastered psychedelic trance flyers in the gaps.

In the end, my six-tatami room became cluttered.

Whenever I wrote a manuscript, the first thing I did was have Saki read it. Up until now. I’d ask her thoughts and opinions. Saki was my dearest reader, editor and teacher. Without her, my manuscript became disorganized and repetitive, the same phrases playing on repeat. I felt so uneasy.

Progress on the manuscript wasn’t going very well, but I had to finish it somehow.

Bad Trip

Two years ago, I attended a rave in Izu.

I was out and about, having stayed up all night to meet a deadline, so I was in a terrible mood. By chance, I stumbled across some LSD, a drug I’d long since stopped using. The effects of psychedelic LSD are greatly influenced by your condition and the environment at the time.

Sure enough, I fell into a bad trip, trapped in my own head with painful hallucinations.

No one could help me at this point. All I could do was hold myself back from screaming. I just had to endure it until the effects of the chemicals wore off. It was hell.

After the party, I was exhausted, unable to even buy a train ticket for the journey back to Tokyo. My friend Nicholas Keiji accompanied me home. On the Shinkansen, I called out for Saki with trembling hands.

I felt like I was all alone in the pitch darkness of space.

Sweat started to pour out of me. Time seemed to slow.

We finally arrived at Tokyo Station. I felt alone in the crowd, invisible amongst them.

My bad trip continued. It was painful. I'd had enough.

I spotted a woman in the crowd.

My wife was waiting for me at the ticket counter.

I was so relieved to see her.

As if passing the baton from my friend to Saki, I grabbed her by the hand and she led me home.

Saki was smiling.

The moment I held her hand, the dam that had been holding everything together broke apart. Tears began to flow.

In the moment, we were the image of a terrified, crying child and his loving mother holding his hand.

But Saki is no longer with us.

The one to hold my hand has vanished from this world. From now on, I have to overcome crises on my own, with nobody to rely on. It should be obvious, but I will never forget the feeling of Saki's hand in mine.

It's so sad to think about.

Why Can't I Die?

I started visiting a certain downtown head shop–slash–bar that stocks many of my books. The staff and customers there were all reading work like *Dangerous Issue No. 1* and *Psychedelic & Trance*. They welcomed me warmly.

One girl even read my work in *BURST HIGH*.

The realization that I had so many readers soothes my lonely heart, just a little.

Some of the girls there would envelop me in a gentle hug when I was visibly depressed.

Another even invited me to her home. When I got there, it was like a foreign housing complex, with people hanging out in messy rooms. Everyone was doing their own thing. They weren't all friends either; they seemed to be acquaintances with vague connections to each other.

I once spoke to a young girl who frequented the bar.

She was only in her early twenties, but she had a strangely brazen and calm demeanor.

She came from Okinawa and was now living with the bar manager, a girl also in her early twenties.

It was the same foreign housing complex I'd visited before, with everyone else inside.

She was unemployed, but didn't seem to be a student, either. She had big eyes, a thin face, with a petite, delicate body. There was something gloomy about her, as if she was suppressing something. She spoke calmly (perhaps too calmly), and I got the feeling that she was eccentric, deep down. Suddenly, my gaze fell to her slender left wrist.

There were countless scars. She didn't seem particularly flustered when I noticed them. Instead, she proudly displayed them to me. That's when the conversation turned to suicide.

"My wife… recently committed suicide," I told her. She didn't seem surprised.

I showed her a piece I'd written for the column in *BURST HIGH*, available in the store, that touched on Saki's death. I'd written it when I was a nervous wreck, right after the incident.

"What do you think?"

"This is no good. You wanna stop people from committing suicide, right? So you shouldn't mention how beautiful or peaceful she was in death. It'll just lead to other people imitating her. And besides, I don't think it's right to think you can stop someone from killing themselves. No one has the right to stop them, do they?"

"Well, suicide is ultimately a matter of ego."

"Then isn't it also egotistic to not want someone to commit suicide?"

"...I can't take this. You're being so blunt about it. This is unbearable for me."

"But, isn't it? Both are egotistic. I think trying to stop someone from killing themselves is a bit naive."

I can never clearly answer the question of why someone shouldn't die.

It's a person's right to commit suicide, and anyone who tries to stop them is said to be selfish. There's no logic to this.

"...You mentioned earlier that your pulse stopped twice. Why'd you do it? Did you really want to die? Or was it just for the thrill of it?"

To this question, she gave a slight smile and didn't answer.

She could've responded with something like, "This world is a rotten place. There's nothing good about it. I don't think the answer is to just muddle through life ugly, miserable and pathetic."

Either way, she seemed to be living while repeatedly attempting suicide for no real reason. And she seemed to take pride in having stopped her pulse twice.

I felt pathetic. I couldn't even persuade a twenty-something-year-old girl like her to believe that dying is "bad."

Maybe her experience is what made her so brazen.

She might be into it for the thrill of it, akin to bungee jumpers or skydivers. Recently she's been saying that she wants to go to fashion school.

"Do you think you'll stop attempting if you go to fashion school?"

"I don't know. I don't know when I'll feel like dying again. But that's ultimately up to me."

I found myself feeling sorry for her romantic partners.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No, but that's okay. My fashion career is more important right now."

I felt a little relieved. I didn't really want to know that much about her personal life.

Saki's death had made me afraid of delving deep into other people's hearts, of prying, worrying, sympathizing.

I'd read in the newspaper about support groups for people who'd lost loved ones to suicide. But I tried to maintain my emotional well-being by meeting up with friends.

But they were always busy. One woman advised, "It's naive to think that seeing people will help you heal. You have to do it alone. Maybe online." It was harsh, but she may have a point. Seeing

friends on a daily basis is near impossible.

I didn't want to go home. I didn't want to be alone, so I desperately wanted to interact with others. I'm not the type to heal by withdrawing, like Yamano.

I wondered where someone like myself could be accepted. But before I could find my place, I had to finish a book that would be good enough to persuade that fashion student from Okinawa to change her mind.

These days, I'm finally starting to think that way.

Something to be Passionate About

On the brink of financial ruin, I had no choice but to work.

I couldn't afford to be trapped in the past anymore.

Dangerous Issue No. 1, my collaborative project with Aoyama Masaaki, is long dead.

No longer am I dangerous. I'm useless.

That's right. What I want to do is be useless.

I want to make junk books. Totally useless junk books.

All I can do is work hard to write a book about how a loser like me manages to survive.

Once I've achieved that, then I can write a book called *Happy Issue No. 1*.

A book that encourages you to enjoy your retirement without chastising the reader. With that plan in mind, I decided that I'll join a gym, do basic exercises and make mountain climbing my ultimate goal. Of course, I'm not physically fit enough to tackle that right now.

I'd also like to soak in a hot spring. My days of taking LSD, smoking weed and partying all day at Goa trance parties are over. Instead, I'm thinking of pivoting towards living a natural life. Drug-free, of course. I think getting high without drugs is what it means to truly be an adult.

Natural highs are the best, after all. While mountains and hot springs sound a bit cliche, the plan I have in mind is one that'll get me just as high, if not higher, than I ever did on drugs.

I'll obey the law, but I want to stay a rebel no matter my age. How can a sober rebel get high in the mountains? These days, I think focusing on that is more forward-thinking than going to raves.

Without a sense of enjoyment, without something you're hooked on, you start wondering what the point of living is. So I've decided to find something new to be passionate about.

According to a clinical psychologist in the US who's counseled over a thousand bereaved families, many survivors lose trust in people and the world around them.

But I'm the opposite. How could I live without believing in people?

Now that I'm in the position of a bereaved family member, I need to stop relying on others and carry Saki's legacy. It's my burden to deal with.

It's so incredibly painful. But I don't want to run away.

Saki's Back

Nekojiru, Aoyama Masaaki, Tatsumi Saki and I are all part of the bubble era.

We were young during its peak and lived comfortably, at least financially. Making the most of our eccentric personalities, we worked in the margins of the publishing industry. We made a living from the culture surrounding *Dangerous Issue No. 1* and enjoyed the final days of the subculture bubble, to a certain extent.

We each had our own unique point of view and approach to life, so it's inappropriate to simply group us by generation. There's also the difference between a suicide driven by desperation and a suicide chosen willingly. Still, we all shared a sense of pessimism about the world in the midst of the Great Recession, feeling it was a difficult, suffocating place to live.

For those who lived by sheer momentum rather than skill, our current world feels incredibly harsh and devoid of hope. Hence, there seems to be a prevailing sentiment that dying now is somehow "acceptable."

This is the age of survival. Only the tenacious will make it.

I too am at rock bottom—the death of my beloved wife, financial ruin, estrangement from my family. When I try to imagine a future for myself, I can't think of a single ray of hope. Perhaps those that have taken their lives were worried and pessimistic about the future much earlier than I was.

I was the most naive of all.

"If you go east, you'll find the Land of the Blessed."

—Saki loved these delusions. She called them "fantasies."

"If you go south, all the men are gay, and all the women possess grace, refinement and decorum."

—Saki held images beyond our reality. They likely stemmed from her desire for circumstances to be a certain way.

Still, she didn't immerse herself entirely in her fantasies. She made considerable effort to live in the real world. But this proved to be incredibly difficult. After all, "the world is full of idiots."

What kind of image did Saki have in mind? I think she was troubled by the gap between expectation and reality, and ended up retreating into the world of imagination. A world where Brahman and Atman become one. I don't have a passport to Saki's world. So I'll never see her again. Ever.

Neither Nekojiru nor Saki were optimistic about the future. Actually, I think they were extremely pessimistic. I'm a fool for not having realized this sooner.

Living is hard. That's how I feel right now, to be honest.

The world sucks and humans are nothing but fools.

What does it mean to live in such a world?

Talking with Nekojiru was so much fun. Working with Aoyama taught me so many things.

And my romance with Saki was sublime. All of it was happiness gained because they were alive.

That's why I choose to live on.

The present and the future are pitch black, bleak and dire.

But I want to live. I want to do good work. I'll live as if the real thing is yet to come.

I still can't understand the motives of Nekojiru or Saki, those who could choose death. I find a small sense of comfort in the things I can't understand.

In any case, those who have died are gone forever. There's no going back. That's why I cling to my delusion that Saki will come back. If I work hard and live my life to the fullest, Saki will surely return.

The day will come where we will meet again.

"THE AGE OF LOVE"

One day in July of 2004, I went to a rave in the mountains of Gunma. It was my first rave since my wife died.

These days, trance music and raves have become popular among rowdy youngsters. There are parties that draw as much as ten thousand people, and the scene has completely changed from the scene I frequented ten years ago. In other words, it's gone mainstream.

Frankly, this has turned the scene into nothing more than a chaotic mess of fights and pick-up

attempts, making it the wrong place for those purely seeking trance or music.

But back in the day, raves were underground affairs—cutting-edge spaces where the sharpest, most dedicated crowd gathered, creating a truly psychedelic atmosphere.

The rave I attended deliberately avoided advertising in magazines, opting for a closed listing limited to five hundred people. This recreated the old vibe, making it a really pleasant party for old-timers like myself.

When I got to the venue, I found that many old friends were there. It felt bittersweet and nostalgic, like some kind of reunion.

I danced alone for a little while. The DJ was RAY, a rave veteran. He played German trance, none of which I recognized. As I moved my body to the rhythm, swaying from side to side, I suddenly found myself in a state of pure focus. Before I knew it, tears were flowing.

These weren't the tears I shed when I think of my wife. Nor were they tears of sadness, but of something warmer. They were the tears of raw emotion and wonder I'd felt back in the days before meeting my wife, when I used to frequent raves. My emotions instantly transported me back ten years.

Wandering around the venue in my broken state, I suddenly noticed a tent in a corner, heavily decorated with all sorts of things. There were pictures of Christian goddesses and angels. Among various goods, several books were displayed. And there it was—THE AGE OF LOVE, a German trance track. It was the record that had moved me so deeply in the last decade. Saki and I often listened to it together. When I declared, "This is the best techno track ever!", she always agreed.

"Huh…?"

I took a closer look. I'd noticed two mooks; one with a feature on pink films, and a yellow vinyl-covered one about drugs.

They were all books my late wife had made!

I fixed my gaze on the collage of goddess photos. Then I noticed that casually blending in among them was a photo of Saki!

"Ah, so that's what this is…!"

I finally realized. This was Saki's altar. It had been planned by the event organizers without my knowledge, and coordinated entirely by Saki's former colleague and friend, Nicholas Keiji.

Unaware of this, I was speechless, and once again burst into tears. Not out of sadness, but out of warmth.

I stood there, stunned, in front of a photo of Saki I'd never seen before. The tears flowed endlessly. To commemorate Saki like this—how incredibly thoughtful and kind!

Expressing their sentiment through the altar rather than words touched me deeply.

"I've had enough of wallowing in my own misery. I'm going to live in the present. I'm going to finish this manuscript." I thought to myself.

The reality of their kindness sank in, and I suddenly felt deeply ashamed of my slump.

At the rave, I felt like something inside me had finally been set free. More than anything, feeling tears of joy flow freely again—rather than shedding tears of sorrow, as I have since Saki's death—was a profoundly moving experience. "My feelings are coming back!"

I felt like I could live again.

No, I absolutely will live. That's what I believed.

From Now On

I sincerely hope this book will help reduce the number of suicides, even if just by one.

I hope that by penning the emotions of those left behind, even a small number of suicides can be prevented. The main message I want to convey in this book is my current belief that suicide is irreversible.

In Japan, more than thirty thousand people have died by suicide each year since 1998.

To those contemplating suicide, I say:

“Wait a minute. Isn’t there someone who would feel an irreparable loss if you died?”

I got carried away during the bubble era and partied too hard. Then I used my depression as an excuse to be overly indulgent. I became far too lazy. But depression might just be an excuse for weakness. It was only through blaming myself for this incident that I finally realized that.

And now, I want to apologize to my wife. Desperately.

But my rock, the person who matters most to me in this world isn’t here. She’s gone. Suicide is truly irreversible.

These days, the word “loneliness” stabs deep into my heart.

But what matters now is how I live from here on out, forging my own path without relying on Saki. Emotionally, I’m still in love with her, but I have to push through that and live in reality.

I have no lifeline anymore. Actually, my debts and my friends are probably the closest thing to it. And no matter how painful it is, I’ve decided to convince myself that living is my destiny. It certainly isn’t the easy path to take, and it’s undoubtedly an arduous journey, but it’s the only way forward.

They say that after about three years, the tears of most bereaved run dry. Memories fade, both the good and the bad. If you remembered everything, you simply couldn’t go on.

But I will never forget Nekojiru, Aoyama or Isaki. Absolutely not.

Now, as time passes, I’m scared of how I’m gradually becoming more and more detached. I don’t want to let the memory of the dead fade. Even if it’s painful, even if it’s lonely, I want to live holding them in my heart.

I have Saki, my absolute confidante. Even now, in death, she remains firmly in my heart. So I must have faith.

“You’re the man I chose!”

I must believe in Saki’s words. If I do, I’m sure I can accomplish something. I can write a book.

And if possible, I want to write a book that would make Saki happy if she were still alive.

Once I’ve written something I can show her, I’ll look up at the sky.

There, surely, Saki’s figure will be reflected like a goddess.

I'm sorry for everything, Saki. I'll live. I'll live as if you're watching me.

So please, don't say "goodbye."

I don't want to hear such a lonesome word.

Saki. Please watch over me.

Let's continue living together.

I'll see you then.

Saki.

Let's meet again.

I love you.

I love you, even from beyond the grave.

P.S.,

The girl I mentioned earlier in this book—the one from Okinawa with the self-harming habit—tried to kill herself again. She overdosed on sleeping pills, but somehow managed to pull through. I plan to give this book to her. I hope it will inspire her to think about what it means to live.

Don't talk about dying. Let's live. That's what I had in mind when I wrote this book.

Losing a Loved One

My dear friend, Nekojiru. My longtime colleague and mentor, Aoyama Masaaki. And my editor and beloved wife, Tatsumi Saki. I wanted write about the events leading up to their suicides to the best of my knowledge. As a writer, I wanted to write while still mentally unstable in order to gain some sort of closure.

In this book, I wanted to focus less on "reasons for death" and more on the feelings of those left behind. What does it mean to lose a friend, a colleague, a wife? How does it feel?

"Dying is easier, so I'll just die." To those who think this way, I wanted to convey the feelings of the bereaved, hoping they would reconsider "life and death" once more.

Could it be that "living on after someone dies" is more difficult than dying? No, it definitely is. Living is incredibly difficult.

Even so, I want to reject the seemingly rational idea that dying is easier than living. Not with logic, but with emotion. Living is painful, but I choose to do it. That's the path I've chosen. Because losing someone is truly heartbreaking. I believe that living, though painful, is also a source of joy.

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This September marks one year since my wife committed suicide. The only reason I've managed to survive this past year is thanks to the support of friends, including manga artist Yamano Hajime. I felt completely alone after losing my beloved wife. But I wasn't. My friends treated me with kindness at times and firmness at others. There was certainly something to be gained from that. I felt that, as long as I had faith in people, I could live.

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I'm deeply grateful to Akada Yuichi, my editor at Asuka Shinsha, for navigating me through this work. He kicked me into gear, guiding me towards writing—towards living. Even when I repeatedly fell into slumps during the process, he never abandoned me. He waited patiently and always offered precise feedback on my clumsy drafts. It's because of him that this book came to be.

"Before she passed away, I heard that Saki wanted to work with me. I'll do my best to honor her wishes." (From a fax I received from Akada at the start of writing)

I undertook this book to honor Saki's final wish.

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Finally, I have something I'd like to say to women approaching middle age: Grow old. Both Nekojiru and Saki held the belief that they'd rather die than grow old.

But what defines a person isn't their looks, figure, or physical age. I believe it's the heart. As long as you're alive, there are sure to be small victories.

There are surely times when you'll think, "I'm happy to be alive." So please, don't be afraid of getting older.

October 16, 2004

Yoshinaga Yoshiaki

In Lieu of an Afterword for the Paperback Edition

I tried hanging myself. I looped a rope around a doorknob, using my own weight to pull myself into the noose. It tightened smoothly, and after letting out a chicken-like squawk, I couldn't breathe. "This is bad," I thought, panic shooting through my body. I slipped my fingers under the rope and loosened it.

Lately, I've been in a slump. Rather, it's been about five years since my wife died and I developed severe depression (among other disorders). During that time, I went from being unable to leave my room to gradually being able to quell my inner turmoil. I returned to publishing for financial reasons about two years ago. Even for someone like myself—a non-bestseller with a gap in my resume—there were still editors here and there encouraging me to write. In a major publishing recession, having even a handful of books to work on was a blessing in disguise.

Still, I just can't get my work done the way I want. I can't be as active and productive as I used to be. I don't do much magazine work (not that I don't want to, I just don't pitch it), so I have no daily income. My cell phone, gas and electricity get cut off constantly.

"I have to recover as soon as possible."

I grew increasingly anxious, tormented by worry. My depression accelerated and I began to view the world with pessimism. Even if my symptoms eased somewhat, it never fundamentally improved (what we call "remission" is when depression temporarily eases with medication). I just couldn't accept the obvious truth: returning to my former self was absolutely impossible.

So I frequently fell into despair and suicidality.

The only time I truly felt alive was when meeting and chatting with friends. For someone like myself, who avoided TV, newspapers, and the internet, that was my sole connection to society. Returning home, I lay alone on the floor, pondering the myth of Sisyphus. My thoughts endlessly circled the meaningless of my existence, and escapist delusions looped in my head.

Then, I tried hanging myself. Not seriously. I was experimenting to see if it could truly kill me.

The result? Physically, it was indeed easy to die. And I'm ashamed to say it, but I also felt fear.

Then I imagined how my friends would feel if I died now. In the grand scheme of things, whether someone like me lives or dies changes nothing in the world. It's no big deal. But when I overlapped that with my own experience and imagined my friends' feelings, and even the feelings of the readers, I felt that my suicide would still be an act of sin.

When this book was published as a hardcover, what first struck me as odd was the number of reader responses I received. Most were not just postcards tossed into my mailbox, but lengthy letters sent in sealed envelopes, and about ninety percent of them were from young women.

Half of them expressed compassion for my psychology, while the other half essentially told me I didn't understand. What was particularly noteworthy was that nearly every letter empathized with my late wife, essentially stating that they understood (or even approved of) her feelings.

Admittedly, I did meticulously recreate everything from my wife's ideological background to her particular lifestyle. I didn't intend to romanticize her, but I acknowledged and valued her existence. Even so, the level of understanding shown towards my wife—who committed the utterly selfish act

of revealing her death mask to her loved ones—seemed excessive.

In other words, many readers of letters written by bereaved families, pleading with me to not give into death, were people who, if possible, wanted to die themselves. Just like my wife. And while they empathize with my pain, they ultimately justify her actions. Moreover, they want to be like her. It seems my suffering made her death appear idyllic.

This response deeply unsettled me and made me ponder. Here was a philosophy of suicide I had never possessed. So I, too, began contemplating philosophically—utterly uncharacteristically. Over and over. And each time I thought it through to the end, I always reached the same conclusion. Terrifyingly, my philosophy began to overlap with that of my readers.

"If you want to die, then die."

That's where it led. At that moment, I think I began to understand the feelings of my wife and the readers who wrote in. But…

Everyone has felt all alone in this world, at least once. Everyone has felt like they're a different breed from those living happy lives.

But surely that's not the case. We're all one race. Not everyone lives easily, nor are they free of weariness. Countless people feel cornered. Yet many of them choose to fight desperately to survive. This isn't just instinct. There must be a reason to live that defies logical explanation.

Everyone carries some sort of burden. We're vulnerable, fragile, and living each day exactly as we wish is incredibly difficult. Yet, most people still muster their strength and somehow get through each day. I'm not the only one hanging by a thread. The whole world is. And humanity, simply by being alive, shares some kind of spiritual bond. There's no such thing as being completely alone in this world.

Even if someone is tormented by alienation and harbors suicidal thoughts, they must be connected to us somewhere as long as they're still alive. That trap of thinking "Why me?" that suicidal people often fall into is, to put it bluntly, a persecution complex.

Finally, yes, living is painful. I'll admit that. But losing a loved one is surely even more painful. That's why I'm alive now.

"Losing a loved one is painful."

I hope you understand.

August 2008

Yoshinaga Yoshiaki

Breaking the Rules: An Explanation

By Kasuga Takehiko

Watching those precious to you—including your wife—pass one after the other undoubtedly deals a

heavy blow to the heart. Especially if those deaths were premature suicides.

If such a twisted, grotesque situation were to occur, wouldn't one likely feel as if they were emitting something ominous or sinister? Wouldn't one feel they possessed some malevolent element that pushes over the edge people who seem to deliberately walk the line of death? Or perhaps, that they themselves have a propensity for misfortune? After all, it's extremely rare for someone to befall such a fate.

I just so happen to be privy to the root of his misfortune. As I read on, it immediately dawned on me. It's simple. The author (hereafter referred to as Y) ended up on this path because of me.

I've never met Y. We (likely) don't have any mutual acquaintances. In other words, we have no connection. However, I am familiar with his work. I've read his book, *Dangerous Issue No. 1*. For some reason, it was lying around in the office of the psychiatric hospital where I worked at the time, so I picked it up half out of curiosity. And I thought it was garbage. It was a trashy magazine filled with low aspirations, twisted arrogance, and mistaking antisocial behavior for freedom and purity. I thought it was a cheap zine pandering to depraved young people with inflated egos, little talent, and a knack for shifting blame. It was utterly repulsive. A cheapness that wasn't even charming and a false bravado seemed to ooze from the pages like a foul stench, radiating a vulgar aura.

I truly believed anyone who could create or write such things was a person of the lowest character. I was thoroughly disgusted. No joke, I cursed the person who made this book, wishing misfortune upon them. I genuinely prayed for disaster to strike them.

Since it was a filthy piece of shit book I couldn't bear to even touch, I quickly erased it from my memory after cursing it. Then, about ten years later, my curse had actually taken effect. Therefore, Y's misfortune stems from my power, but looking back further, his misfortune is entirely of his own doing. I feel no sympathy for him. Incidentally, I also detest techno/trance music.

The three who were close to Y and departed for the other side so soon share a common theme. Indeed, from Y's perspective, they must have been individuals whose talents shone brightly, whose intense personalities stood out, who possessed the backbone to refuse pandering to the masses, yet were owners of extremely delicate and vulnerable souls. Even if it was merely at the level of convincing themselves their spirit was noble by reading Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, their presence was still dazzling. Even if one possesses only the shallow mentality that condemns salarymen as despicable inside and out simply because of their suits, they thought of themselves as descendants of Rimbaud. They were captivated by death. The more they feared it, the more they were drawn to it. Why is death so alluring? Because it is the ultimate trump card, one that unsettles most. Death comes to everyone. No one escapes it. Death is commonplace; no matter how one dies, death itself is ordinary. Why do pretentious people, those who consider themselves spiritual aristocrats, cling so fiercely to something so ordinary? Death is a physiological process, akin to perspiration, halitosis or excrement. I cannot fathom the mindset that treats such things as special.

Finally, when observing people who commit suicide, their motives ultimately boil down to two things:

rage and disgust. The former is an impulsive act carried out in a state of hotheadedness. The latter is an act of complete disillusionment with the world, humanity and oneself. Therefore, the two can sometimes combine.

All three of these people (and Y as well) seem to have had a distorted upbringing, and growing up in such households left them harboring anger, self-loathing, and emptiness that they were unable to quell. From this perspective, they may have an innate victim mentality. Behind their arrogant and brazen tone, a deep sense of helplessness, alienation and despair must be buried somewhere deep down. They'd probably never admit it, but alongside their resentment and anger towards their families, they likely feel guilty for harboring such emotions. This guilt may have contributed to their sense of being at a loss with themselves.

Death is banal. That is precisely why, when they draw closer to death, they can relax and unwind. Because there's no need to put on airs anymore. For everyone, it's unprecedented, yet death is a boring, dull thing that leaves one utterly dumbfounded. When one is at a loss with oneself, tired of trying to be special, it's perhaps no wonder they might want to plunge into ultimate banality.

Incidentally, Y is far more ordinary than the three who passed away. That's precisely why he survives, even working at a convenience store. It's fascinating that mediocrity affirms life, yet death is the height of banality. It was likely because Y balanced these two extremes so well that three mentally unstable individuals gravitated towards him. In truth, Y is a bumbling, foolish junkie who writes worthless books, but he's kind. He has goodwill and sincerity. He's sentimental and (embarrassingly so) romantic. The personality of Y glimpsed in this book often seems hard to reconcile with his Dangerous Issue No. 1 image. Yet it was precisely this strange coexistence that made him a comforting presence for the three.

Y comes across as a surprisingly clumsy and inept person. Had he been a sly, cunning man, the three would have instinctively despised him, and he wouldn't have presented any opportunity for me to curse him. He wouldn't have written such a pathetic book such as this one, either. It was because of his character that the three encircled him and eventually self-destructed, whether out of rage or sheer disgust. Y's presence likely slowed the pace of their self-destruction and acted as a catalyst for them to unleash their talents. But in the end, they all plunged towards death, and Y feels somewhere that it's his responsibility. That's delusional. Y bears no blame. If anything, the only problem with Y is that he's a half-baked, diabolical editor who put out trashy magazines and was cursed by me, the reader.

How exactly should this book be read? As a Boris Vian-esque coming-of-age story of youth tinged with immortality? As a case study of people with personality disorders? As an insider scoop on certain subcultures? Or as the wailing memoir of a man who has lost his loved ones?

Whichever it is, this book is poorly executed and lukewarm. Honestly, it makes you wonder if it's even worthy of being paid to read. Is Y's brain fried from all the drugs? Or was he just a loser to begin with? Both are probably correct. However, what deserves attention is that this book, at least, is painfully genuine. Whether wallowing in self-pity, complaining, or spouting tedious platitudes that make you wince, it remains unguarded and honest.

There's a passage that reads,

"I once showed an abridged version of this manuscript to a female editor at a publishing company.

"I didn't know Saki," she said. "But as someone who never met her, I can't bring myself to like the Saki portrayed in this manuscript. She's totally dependent on her father, dancing through the publishing boom, and when life gets too difficult, she dies. Frankly, I can't sympathize with her."

I agree with the female editor. Yet Y writes,

"Objectively speaking, Saki was very selfish. But even if she was, my love for her remains the same. No matter how selfish she was, to me she was my beloved "Saki-chan." That editor simply didn't have eyes to see."

But if you bring love into the picture here, all you can really say is, "Oh, I see." A decent writer wouldn't resort to such a blunt, unvarnished word as "love." Just as those three brought up the "rule-breaking" of death, Y tried to affirm everything with the "rule-breaking" of love. Perhaps this recklessness is what makes this book so meaningful. In other words, it depicts the powerlessness and blindness of love. If you think about it that way, this book may actually have more value than you'd expect, unlike *Dangerous Issue No. 1*.

-Psychiatrist